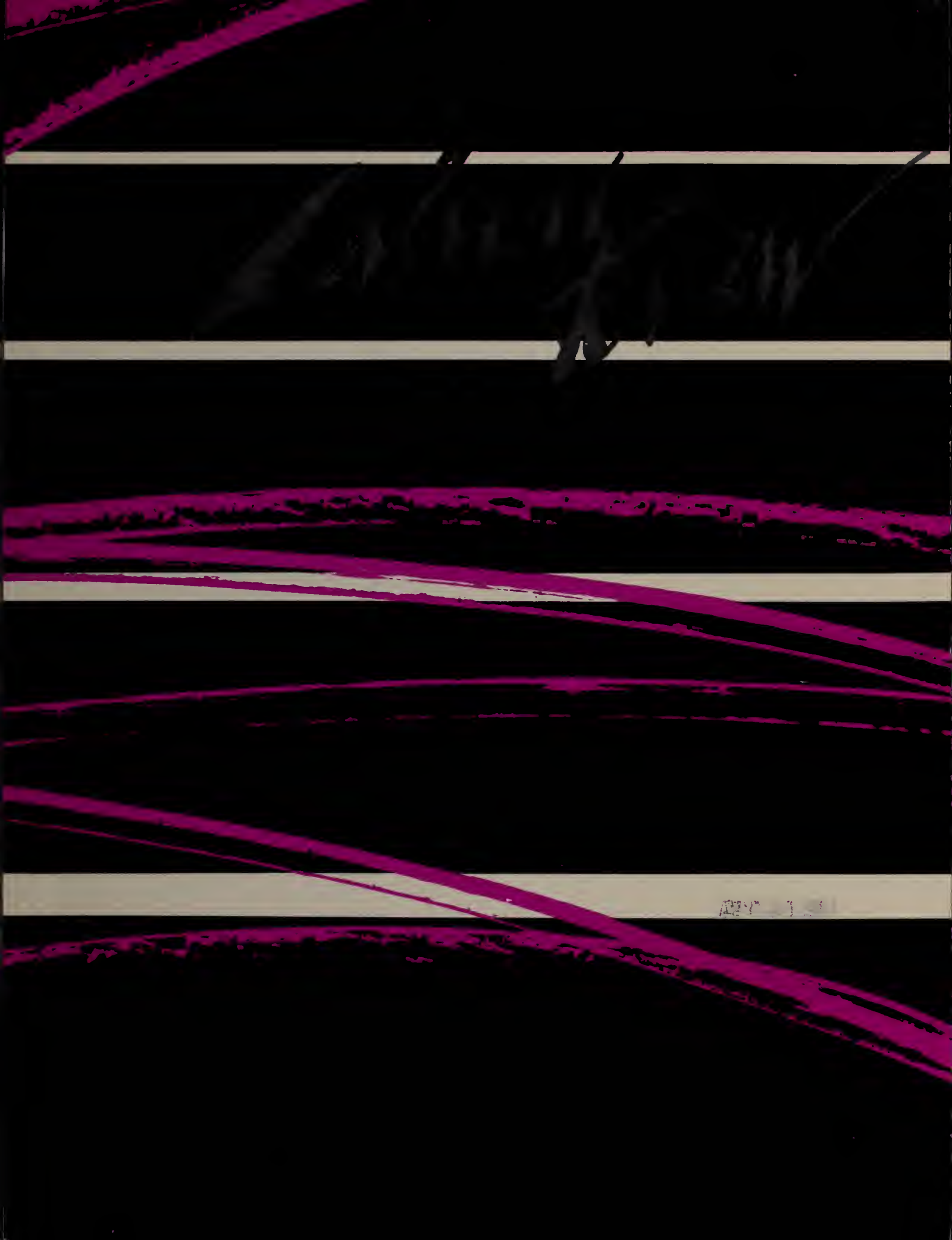

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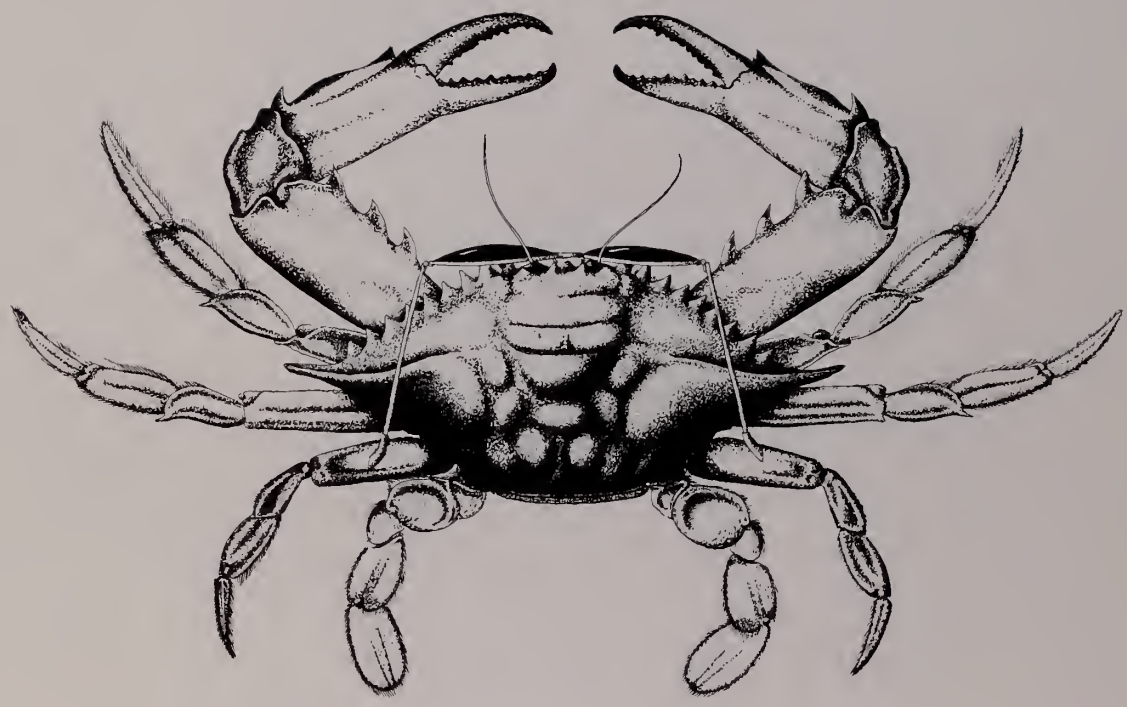

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EDWARD A TRUMBULL FEB '80

*Edward A. Trumbull*

*Debbie Gertler*

# In the Light of the Afternoon

After breakfast he went to the closet to get his corduroy coat. The early morning light was cold in the tiny house.

"It will be a good day to work."

"They should all be good days to work."

"But this day will be a fine day to work."

She lit a cigarette and dropped the match on a saucer. Her coffee was no longer warm and her fingernails were chipped pink against the white china.

"You say that all the days, old man. You say, 'Today will be a fine day to work. Today the stone and I will work as one.' And I say what I will say now, all the days should be good to work."

He buttoned his coat and took the long last sip of coffee. The steam fogged his glasses so he wiped them carefuly on the leg of his overalls.

"Today is different. You will see. The winter is over and the Stone will yield."

He stepped outside and closed the door quietly behind him. The sun was barely over the peak of the ridge. It warmed the rocky top, but the cliff of granite and the small yard lay in cold shadow.

"She will see. Today will be different."

Grass cracked under his feet on the walk to the shed. He covered his mouth with his hand and blew. Warm breath melted the ice that had formed on his beard. The stream by the fence was high on its banks. He knew it would get no higher since the sun had already melted most of the snow in the mountains. A slight breeze blew through the forest, but the tall pines remained stiff.

He couldn't remember why he still locked the shed door. They were far from any others and the roads up were still littered with the falling rocks of the winter thaw. Maybe the wheelbarrow was worth stealing, but it was old with rust and could not carry much weight. The tools were worth much to him, but most men would have little use for his mallets and chisels. The old steel mallet felt good in his hand. His fingers had worn deep furrows in the wooden handle. It would have to be replaced soon, he knew the crack at the base could stand little force. He had many new mallets from the times he had gone to the city. They sat in the box under the nail where the spare key to the shed hung. The new handles didn't feel right and the weight of the head had to be perfect or the stone would fight back. New chisels he could use. Chisels didn't last as long as the mallets and he reminded himself to be careful when he ground them. If they got too hot they would lose the temper and bend against the stone. He took old chisels from the bench. They were heavy and cold to touch but the points were fine and they didn't need to be ground.

When he stepped outside the sun had mounted the peak and the yard lay green in the sunshine. Large pieces of pink and white marble lay in the wet grass. He closed the door of the shed without locking it. The piece he was working on lay on its side by the fence. Two sparrows sat on the fence warming themselves in the sunlight. They flew off into the thick pine when he dropped his tools in the grass. The stone was white and had many small chips around it.

"These black veins will look fine when you are polished, Stone. You will be a fine piece, maybe my best. She will see."

He held his back to bend and get the mallet and a chisel. He went to work on the only corner that had not been rounded and remembered how the forms had used to come. The stones had told him what to do then. All he had had to do was chisel. When the chiseling was done all he had to do was round the forms with the sharp claws. When the forms were round and fine all he had to do was file, then sand, then the stone would be smooth and beautiful. It would catch the light from the sun or the stream and throw it back in a new way. The stones could never have been done differently. He knew there was only one form in any stone. All he must do is chisel until he found it. All the stones had been easy like that. He smiled and looked at the sun. His glasses had many old scratches on them from the flying chips of marble and he could look at the sun without hurting his eyes. He raised the mallet and the sun shone down on the heavy head. It was silver from long use and the old man swung it regularly with an experienced grace. It would make a silver arc through the sky and the marble chips would be-fly.

The sun was high on the yard when he stopped. He was sure now that the winter was over. The trees were beginning to thaw and sway in the light breeze. And the ground was muddy where his weight had been. He knew he shouldn't look at the stone. He should look into the stream where the trout would be in the summer. Or he should look into the trees covering the gentle slopes of the mountains. He should look to the top of the mountain, deep blue in the afternoon sun. But he looked at the stone and it looked as it did in the morning. There were many more chips on the ground and his boots were white from the dust but the stone had not changed.

"You Stone, are getting too much like me."

A deer, no longer frightened by the chiseling, swayed to the steam to drink the cold water.

"You are getting old and tough like me. But the stubborn; the stubborn you get from her."

Leaning on the fence the old man watched the stone in the light of the afternoon. The sun shone down, but the rough surface gave back nothing.

"When you are finished like the others I will sell you in the city. Though I may love you more than the others there are many things my wife and I could use. Perhaps you, Stone, are the only one left that knows I can still carve. The marble of back home I have not seen for a long time. It is black marble and it is tough. It is hard to chisel and it is hard to file. But when it is done it is the most beautiful thing."

He wiped the sweat from his face. The handkerchief was grey from the dust but he found a clean corner to wipe his glasses. The piano was being played inside. Startled, the deer ran from the stream into the shaded wood.

"Here she goes again Stone. A fine day such as this and this is how she plays the piano?"

The stone sat in the grass. It's very top was unmarred by the chisel and it was worn by the rain and snow. The old man could still see the form beneath the rough surface. He was not too old to see that. But when he could not get it to come he looked into the stream. He remembered the trout when he first moved to the tiny house. And how he hated to go to the city when he could watch them in the cold water beneath the shadows of the trees. And the turtles would sun themselves on the marble they could climb. She had found a turtle on its back once. It had tumbled while climbing a piece and she had used it to make dinner. He had gotten very angry. The turtles had helped him in many stones, like the trees and the fish. But the soup had been very good and he remembered having the remains for lunch the next day.

"How is the stone, old man?"

"Fine. Fine old woman. And how are you?"

"Are you ready for your lunch on this fine day?"

He hung his coat on a fence post. His shoulders were tired and the warm sun felt good through his thin shirt.

"And how is your piano?"

"The piano is the same, like your stone. But I am getting better."

In the small house the soup smelled very good. It was tomato, and there was fresh bread and onion on the counter.

"You look tired, old man."

"It is nothing."

She sliced the bread in long graceful strokes. When he pulled a piece to eat some steam escaped from the center.

"I have taken more from the stone than it has taken from me."

"Even if it is a fine day, take care, Kenn. The sun is hot."

"Did you notice the woods?"

"No."

"Did you see the winter is over? Maybe only the stone and I can see it."

He looked out the window and saw the deer back at the stream. Its hair was ruffled by the breeze and the pines bent slightly.

"You and the stone. The stone. When was the last time a stone took you to the city old man? When was the last time you took a stone?"

"It does not matter. If I never take another stone to the city it will be fine. I will. But if I don't it does not matter."

"Yes, I guess it does not matter. Whatever you say old man."

"The soup smells good. Where is our soup?"

*Richard Murchake*

## School Pictures

When we were small and fretful
Mother tied our caps
with three neat jerks
and a pinch.

We walked to school on gravel
through woods we called
enchanted
because they sang
because they were trees and earth
and sweet wet smells
before the dust of chalk ledges
and Sisters Mary Anne and
Consolata and Elaine—
their sewn-black eyes.

Were their headdresses too tight?
Did they ever go swimming?
Did they even have hair?

Toby Redmond never washed his face.
They brought the clanking bucket's water
steamed the windows with their holiness
and his pale squeaks
consecrated the green soap
to ungrime his sins.

Mother washed our faces
so we laughed
and squirmed on wooden seats.

The pictures you misplace
come back one day
when winter shines its tooth.

They stand scornful carcasses of fish
picked white and breathless and clean.

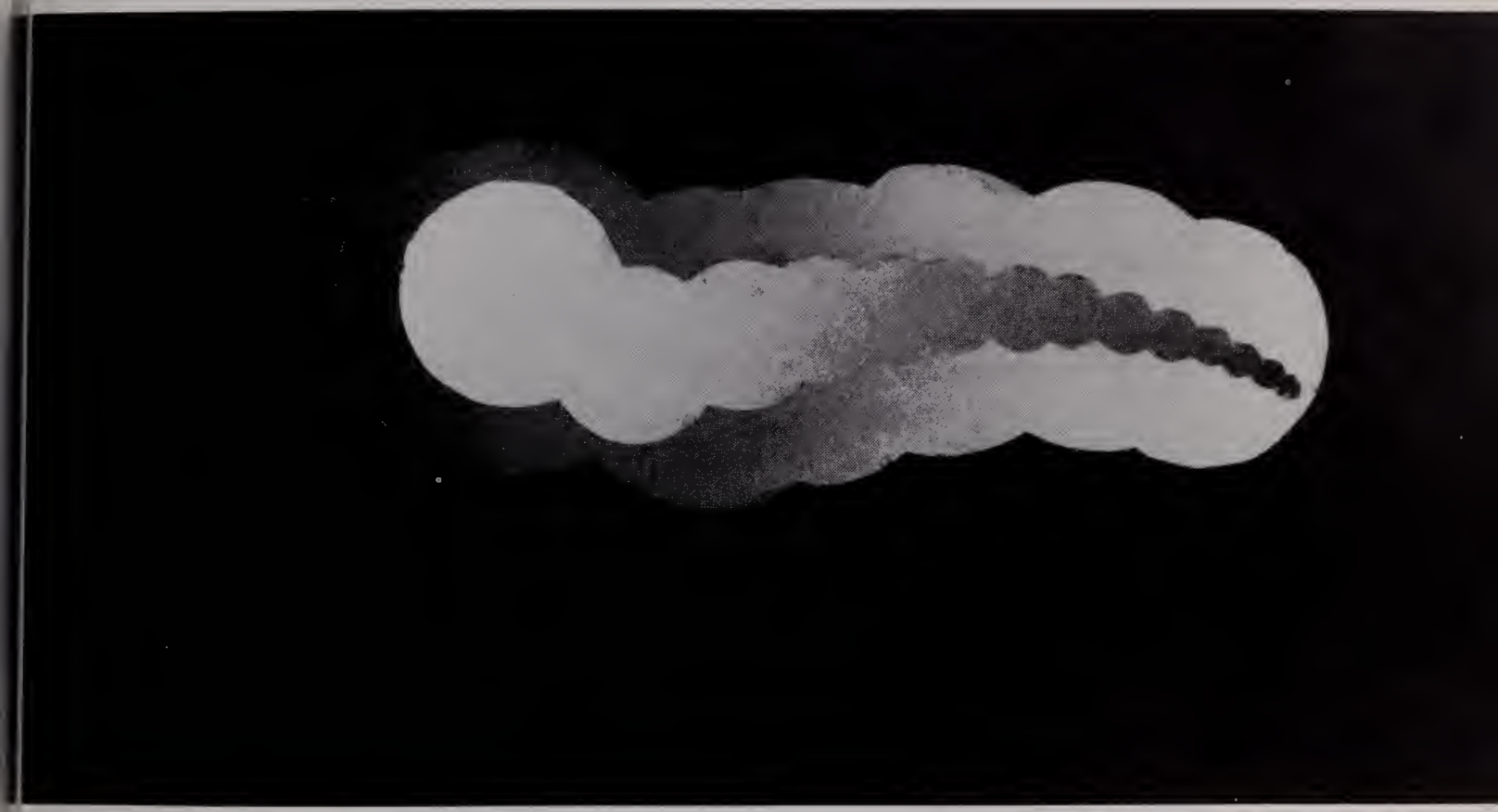
*Moira Kathleen Burns*

*Tony Green*

## Father on the Sofa of Dreams

Often you drifted to sleep on the sofa and dreamed
The dreams of dogs who move nocturnal paws
Across a landscape of rabbit meadows,
Released by the night.
Inside, to the rhythm of your cadenced snores,
A hound roamed surely, ears flown back,
Soft tongue lolling casually at one side of the mouth,
Loping with the easy speed
Of the chase that can last forever.

*Kathryn Riley*



*Dorothea J. Greco*

## Haters of Women

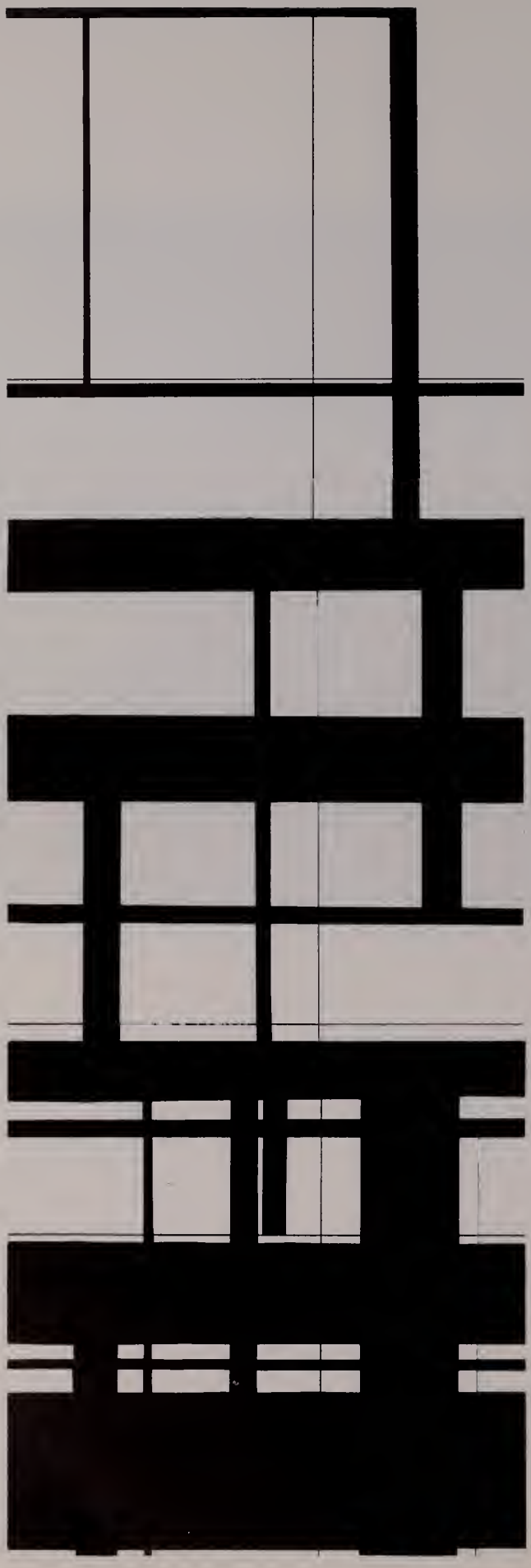
I used to know a girl who was a stripper.
She said: "It's so easy for a dancer
To pick out the misogynists in the crowd.
The normal creeps are the ones guzzling
Beer and howling like banshees, always
Looking at your chest, or staring between
Your legs. But the mysogynists are the
Ones who order one beer and never drink it.
They're the only people in the world who
Can make a girl feel really shitty about
What she's doing."
"How's that?" I asked.
"They don't look at your body. They look
Right into your eyes."

*Lee Seymour*

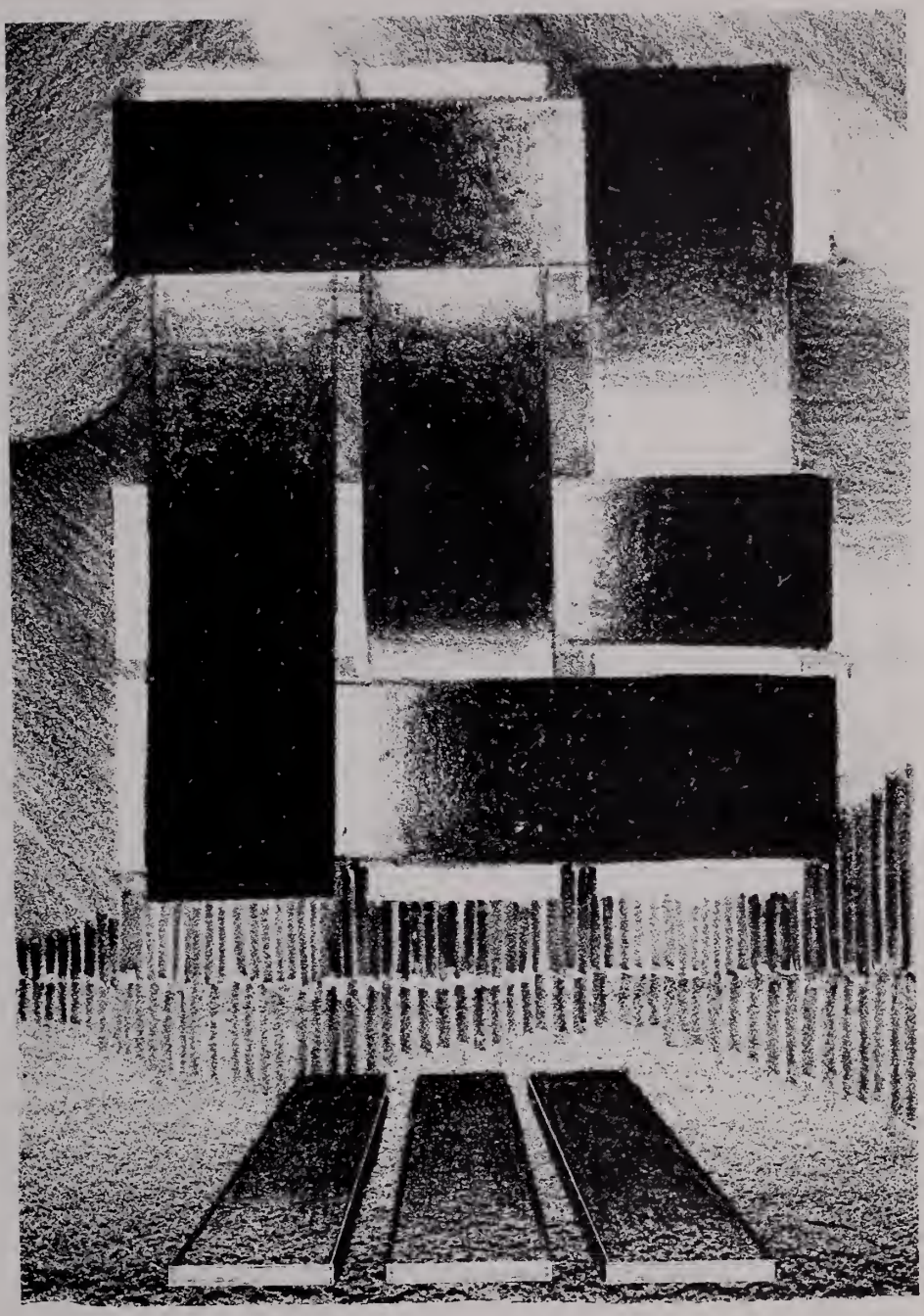
## Misogyny

You know how it hurts when you laugh at me.
And I'm so lonely I don't know what to do.
Oh, I hate everything that I see.
And right now, baby doll, all I see is you.

*Lee Seymour*



*Claudia Diamond*



*Doug Dickson*

# The Breaking of Tuffy Powell

Even after her just telling me he was out of the hospital and would probably be coming by. Even after the scrunch of the storm door, that familiar shuffle of heavy black tie-shoes and the rapping on the corner glass panel closest the outside knob. Even while I spread the venetian blinds — I never expected him to look like he did. His large frame hulking in refracted streetlight in the steady drizzle, soaking wet, with that godawful guard on his nose that covered the center muzzle of his face, and made him loom monstrous momentarily in some other world — probably of pain — but mostly just swaying there on the front porch waiting for me to open the goddam door — hurt as he was, always conscious of *all* his uncomforts.

She was right on the mark, Mom, almost to the minute — 6:10 — not that he had come straight from the Hospital Center either. "Tuff, *Je-sus*, you look awful": it was all I could manage. And Mom caroling "Jack, Jack, Jack, Lord help us." And Tuff, for one of those rare moments, not quite sure on his feet — from the pain and the pills and the bottle he had picked up on the way home — somewhere between crying and heading downtown to kill the dudes who broke his face, but closer to crying, for one of those rare moments.

Thru the binds a pickup rocked back and forth, preoccupied and edgy, waiting to pull back into traffic.

Tuff — Jack, that is, to Mom and strangers — Tuff rolls in at eight in the morning already stewed to the gills, boiled like a lobster, fuming because he stubbed his toe on a gas meter sticking up out of the ground on his way over from the Blair County Police Parking lot across the street. Neither of us in fact live Mom's home over on Eire Street (me at Julie's all the time and Tuff out at Lemon Tree Farm Apartments) but when we visit we always park in the lot. Deep down we feel we own it because we played in it when it was still people's front yards. Tuff feels like he owns it even more than I do — he's twelve years older but more importantly he's also a cop, though not a Blair County cop.

Having never been further away than Atlantic City or Nagshead, yet by the same token having kept tabs on everyone even peripherally associated with his life in the Washington area, Tuff was on the phone in very short order to Jerry Ryan, Attorney-at-Law, who he last saw — probably in eighth grade, some twenty years ago, even then classmates at best:

"Hullo, Jerry? Jack Powell here."

"Yes Jack, what can I do for you?"

"Say, Jerry, got a little problem thought you might help me with."

"Do what I can Jack. Shoot."

"Yea, well I'm over here at my mother's house over on Eire you know? And I'm coming across the street to the house a couple of minutes ago and there's this gas meter sticking a good five inches out of the sidewalk. Jerry, I'm not kiddin' you it was at least five inches high. Anyway, Jerry, I know your time is valuable, so to make a long story short, I tore the hell outta my toe so I called you."

"I see. Tell me this, Jack, have you been to the hospital yet?"

"No. No I haven't, Jerry. I figured I'd head over to Ho-ly Cross after I talk with you."

"Fine. The other thing is we're gonna need a photo of it. That — that would be great, if you could get it on film. Can you get a picture of it and get back to me? Then we can see where to go and what our options are."

"Jerry — just like water off a duck's back."

"Aallright, Jack, we'll be talking to you then. Good hearing from you after so long. OOOK, that's right. Good-bye."

After thirty futile minutes of prodding Mom (still in her bathrobe) to search for a Kodak on the closet shelf, the china cupboard, and each of the three bedroom shelves, and after he got Mrs. Clevenger, our next door neighbor, to look for one for ten minutes — which was even more of a feat — Tuff took the only course of action still open to him: he started calling the gas company every ten minutes alternately threatening to sue them or come through their front door shooting.

He was still at it when I walked in at four. I had just gotten off from the post office. He was raging into the phone "I got my lawyer on the case and your ass is mine you mealy-mouth motherfucker. . ." and you just knew it was some poor jerk on the other end wondering "what in the world?"

"Say Tuff" I uttered noncommitally, closing the door. I had decided weeks ago to just ignore him when he was on a rampage. Using the phone like this to hold people hostage. Or even how he'd rant and rave around Mom about his estranged wife Barbara, the new civilian clerks at the precinct, or "Do-Good Liberals." Passing by him in that captain's chair by the front desk, I see him cubistically again like a Picasso and think: drinking has a way of subdividing until the only ones left are the drinker and the last few loved ones around him. And it is a whirlpool from which, for reasons unknown, only the lightest and tightest will rise — not necessarily those who give of themselves the most. I head on through the dining room into the kitchen; he's really at it: ". . . come down there and tighten that silly little knot round your neck . . . "

"He's been at it all day" Mom confides fast as a school girl — or like water busting loose. "It's where he wants to kill *every*-body, you know. He must've scared them down at the gas company because they were out here fixing it within the hour." Her hands are fluttering fragily. We both jump when the receiver slams down, hard like the phone'll crack in two. Then, he's rushing toward the kitchen. He sails through, calling over his shoulder "Blake — you're not worth the pimple on a man's ass," and bangs out the back door. She gives chase. Around the corner her voice, a little self-conscious, repeating: "Now Jack you leave those tomato plants alone."

At the time you swear you never want to see him again — Tuff, that is. You just want to get rid of him so you can sit and catch your breath. He always was a fighter. Before he was a cop; before he played at DeMatha for Morgan Wooten back in the late 50's; he'd always as soon hit you as look at you if he thought you were wrong about something. But his heart was as big as his hands were quick and folks outside the family always seemed to take to Tuff first. The perfect host; like a fixture the way he fills that captain's chair by the front desk, by the front door. Right elbow supporting his weight on the chair's arm; left hand on his knee, he hovers extended in time sometimes for hours; an ashtray two inches from him on the desk within easy reach and near the telephone.

But pretty shortly after relief drains through your system, the worry sets in, and increases with each passing day he fails to reappear. There is a checklist of persons to call: Nick who runs the drycleaners down on 14th street; Sergeant Summers who says he's already out on *special* sick leave but who'll check a few places; his roommate and ex-partner Jerry Farkle who has the intelligence of an egg salad sandwich; and of course the last item on the checklist: calling all the emergency rooms around town — half of whom wouldn't re-admit Tuff, even if he crawled across the automatic door mat on his belly. When he finally surfaces, you feel like you've spotted Moby Dick. It doesn't mean you've got him: it simply means the chase is on.

Tuff first surfaced in Mount Rainier at the American Legion Post, on Eastern Avenue on the Maryland-District line. His green '65 Caprice, a patched battlestar, was parked back of a '72 Dodge Pickup. He had a broken rear window with shattered glass all over his backseat. Front-end out of alignment, wearing uneven, transmission slowly dropping out; it got to be interchangeable: talking about Tuff, talking about his car.

He entered the Legion: enclosed with wood paneling, smokeswirled, murmurous. The door flared open, then shut. Tuff blinked to get used to the dark. When you go far enough inwards you end up outside looking in, when you drink you start out god-like up above the rim of a glass or bottle. Faces linger before him now, lining the bar like groupers, float into focus singily, each one an endangered species.

"*Man.* I hate to get up and move."

"He's only here two hours and he's got to go?" George Kraft says purposely loud, talking to a crowd that hasn't slid off their stools to gather round yet.

"Who? Tuff?" a voice far down at the end from Tuff says. Tuff disregards, stares at the turned under cuff of George's flannel shirt and his hacked, scarred fingers cupping his glass.

"Where the hell do you got to be, anyway? Lawyers?" Kraft says the last word into his ice.

Tuff's face is momentarily still before suddenly erupting in mild indignation: "Why you phoney sonuvabitch, I know you pay more alimony than I'm ever gonna dream about having to pay when I finally ditch that whore of mine. Don't tell me about lawyers *or* whores. You know she had the nerve to charge $3000 worth of clothes for her and the kids. The kids — hey — that's fine I'm glad to do it for'em even if I don't got $3000 — you know, that's no problem — but knowing Barbara, she probably spent it all on herself. Good for nothin'."

"Yea, well where the hell *do* you gotta be tonight?" Kraft persists.

"I don't understand it, George, why what I do tonight is so important. Hey — don't get me wrong — I'm impressed, I really am. Maybe TV'll make a show about me. No, I'll tell you — since it's so important to you to know what it is I'm doing tonight, I'll tell you that I gotta go pick up a car at L.P. Edwards over at 3400 Benning Road. It's been waiting on me a couple days now; better be making my way on by there in a bit. *Man,* I hate to get up and move." Tuff has this sort of hang-dog look about him — as if every muscle and bone in his body has conspired to ache him to death. He looks accusingly, for a second, at his tasteless cigarette.

"New car?" Kraft asks.

"Used. L.P. Edwards over on Benning Road. Used cars. I got a friend over there who had his eye out for me. One of my *many* contacts." Tuff's eyelids smirk, closing; he rattles his drink home in a couple of final gulps. His eyes water and roar.

Kraft and several others are still talking Legionese around him, but Tuff has slipped below the rim. Brooding. Now swilling his whiskey. Getting mad again. Remulling the time he thought Dan Pironne had lent him that red Chrysler LeBaron for the weekend; when he came back and found out Dan had had to charge him. And not only that, but that some stupid nigger had shorted the electrical system in his car which he had left to be fixed. After he had emptied his revolver into L.P. Edwards' ceiling, and after Bobby Allison from over in old #2 arrived on the scene and advised that he get the hell outta there before *real* trouble arrived, Tuff had steered clear of the place. But that was two years ago, and anyway he had never fallen out with Dan. He had just got mad and lost his temper. He knew Dan would always do what he could for him. *Was* doing what he could for him. After all, he had just found Tuff this Plymouth Fury with only 32,000 miles on it. If he could just talk Dan out of the title tonight so he could drive the damn thing home without having to come back another time for it. Which reminded him that Dan and Jim both mentioned to him there was some guy hanging around the lot the other day asking some questions. Nothing specific; mainly how was he doing, was he still married and living at the house on Myrtle. Dan and Jim both agreed: he was a black male, medium height, reddish tint to the skin and hair, medium bush, inside-out Peters jacket, dark pants and shoes (scuffed), rotting teeth, and a noticeable nick — closer to a small chunk — gone from below the knuckle of his right pinky. Tuff wondered if it bore any connection with his hearing about Little Red Evans the other day. He was supposed to be in Lorton doing ten years for armed robbery, but that didn't mean a helluva lot. Half the inmates got out every other weekend for any number of excuses to have a day on the Nation's Capital. He couldn't remember where he had heard about Evans, but it was either the station or the courthouse. He had let the name glance off him at the time not wanting to disturb his ulcer which was bothering him enough already.

Most guys you busted — who the judges didn't turn right back out the front door — forgot you. They might remember you as the "*PO*-lice" who put 'em away — but it wasn't personal. They'd just as soon avoid you as hunt you up. Evans was different. Tuff had talked to him on several occasions during his thirteen years on the force: seen him grow up; go from stealing tapedecks and cars to breaking and entering, and finally drug running. Twice he had hit Fat Al's Pizza's basement (Al being the biggest fence in the

area). He had hit the Citgo over on Wallace; and most dangerously, he moved dope — big stuff: coke, smack, crank — for Linwood Shane. As far as Tuff was concerned, it was Evans who had raped, knifed, and left an eighteen year-old Northeast girl dumped in a creek not far from her apartment. Nick down at the laundromat had given him this information, and Nick had solved more cases than most of 3-D put together recently. Tuff realized it could have been Nick's daughter who lived in the same neighborhood as the victim. In another part of the area it could've been his own daughter. He gets put away a few years, sure. Big lousy deal. What about the woman? Or the victims' families who have to grieve over them or nurse them the rest of their lives. What happens to them? "What happens for them? Good for nothing animal even bit off her nipple."

"What'd you say?" Kraft inquires; much more hesitantly than before.

Other disembodied voices in the bar punctuate time cranking by like a player piano.

"Bleeding hearts and hypocrites. That mealy-mouthed Lafeyette just like a pimp sashaying down 14th Street where every junky, pickpocket, and robber who'll ever come into his court can see 'em plain as day."

Down the bar one voice confides to another "Don't let him bother you none, he talks to himself like this all the time. Usually before he hits the road."

Tuff stood stiffly, roughly pushing his stool away with the backs of his thighs, pants hopelessly wrinkled.

"Charlie," Tuff waves to the bartender, "You're my right hand man. Charlie, take care pal, we'll be seein' you."

"Tuff," Charlie answers with genuine heart, "you take care of yourself now."

The door sucks shut behind him. Fresh air and the blare of the streetlights all spin off Tuff's corneas. He cups his hands and lights up a Salem: sees some dude across the street standing near the edge of a thin woods, but on the sidewalk. Tuff pauses a second. Begins to see the pale face and reddish tinted hair stand out. The dark figure does not walk off. Tuff begins step by step, decidedly, honed by routine, as if he were trying to catch someone mimicing him in a mirror. The figure moves clearly now to the curb to cross the street. The Caprice is thirty yards from Tuff. His car he knows will likely as not *not* start up right up. He notices the pickup. The figure's shadow follows, passes, then proceeds itself crossing the street — in the white spot cast by the streetlight. Better to have it out now. Better here than over on Wallace, or somewhere in Northeast or over at L. P. Edwards. Tuff crouches behind the truck, between it and his Caprice. Thinks grotesquely for one second that he might indeed be using the cemetery plot before he's paid off his twenty installments. A pebble is drilling itself into his knee cap. The figure in the jacket and cap is across now and pauses to light up a cigarette. Tuff forgets himself a second, is somewhere else crawling for a reason he can't quite remember — shuts down — forgetting who he was after anyway . . . or how the hell Evans even got out of jail.

The first thing Tuff thought he heard was the muffled concern of the small group assembled out front of the Legion, around the Dodge pickup. The first thing he knows he remembered was the firm grasp of somebody's hand on his forearm and a voice already in motion mouthing "Hey are you alright hey are you alright hey are you OK?" And then the scraping and the banging to get out from underneath the blasted thing.

Everyone agreed they'd never seen anybody pass out beneath a parked truck. They also agreed he was in no condition to drive. But in their milling about and gawking, they made the fatal mistake of mustering up four times the cabfare Tuff needed to get safely home. Tuff naturally — having taken his bearings and firmed things up a bit — directly commandeered the cab right down New York Avenue to Eddie's Lounge at 9th & Florida N.E. Eddie's was a small hole in the wall down in an area of town that looked like it had been bombed out years ago: only recently had the plywood store fronts begun to come down.

Tuff put down about six boilermakers in his first hour. It was an all-black bar so Tuff's face floated ghostly beneath the dimly lit Miller clock. The juke box was winding up some Delphonics tune. At the pool table towards the back three dudes shot a seemingly endless game of cutthroat. Another guy carried three beers past the light of the pool table, back to his table in a dark corner. Someone walked back into the kitchen; then another. Tuff was beginning to mumble to himself about his toe still hurting him so he could hardly walk right, but how he was still man enough to take on any chump in the place. Faces began to swivel slowly his way. "Why I oughta go down there, find that whimp at the gas company who didn't know his ass from a hole in the ground and kick his lily-white tail. Nothin' but a do-good liberal. Phoney. They're all alike; do-gooders talk and talk and talk when all along they can't even change a tire or tell one nigger from another without a license plate hanging round their necks. Good for nothing. Just like those new clerks down at the precinct, don't know a #112 from a #714 and then try and tell *me I'm* stupid. Those motherfuckers, I oughta blow'em all away, that's what I'll do I'll just blow 'em all away. Fuck 'em. Sergeant Summers telling me I'm drinking too much. I *never* thought I'd hear Bill say that. I have more sources getting me information than any *PO*-lice officer in the whole Metro-pol'tan de-partment. Homocide asked for me. Because they knew I was a good cop, an honest cop. Hell, the Sergeant's Test — I was the only one in the office to pass that, and I didn't even want to take it. Didn't want to go back into uniform. But Bill Summers said take it anyway, what the hell. I told Bill several times I'd rather be out on the street working with people. Locking the *right* people up for a change. They keep saying it's the drinking. Dr. Frank keeps saying that to me. Hell, I drank before I ever came on the force. I drank when Morgan Wooten moved me up to starting guard back at DeMatha. It's not the drinking, it's this job and my nerves. I wouldn't mind so much if those good-for-nothing judges didn't turn 'em right back out the front door. They're outta court before I am. They really are. I come down here on my day off, with no pay, and for what? To see Judge Lafayette tell some pimp decked out like a Christmas tree, 'Well I know you're guilty but I'm gonna find you not guilty *this* time.' In front of the whole District Court, just because of a small procedural error. And they call us pigs. And they wonder why we stick together. And they call me an Al-co-hol-ic when I drank before I ever came on. This job's lost me my house, my wife, and my kids and what for? So my son'll come up to me and tell me he wants to be a *PO*-lice off-cer like his old man making me have to hit him? Making me have to knock that thought out of his head and threaten to knock his ass to Kingdom Come if he

*David Hubbard*

ever says it again? Good for nothin'. Barbara's a whore. That's just a fact. She's lost. She was goin' from door to door. Larry's no better than the next-door adulterer. Lafayette's a schizo-phrenic pimp masquarading as a District Judge. Dr. Frank — he don't care no more, he just keeps shoving pills at me. Sergeant Summers —now he tells me I should save the drinking for my day off and now he ain't no better than the rest —just another pencil pusher — just like Jerry Davis who never walked a beat but got to be Police Chief fighting crime with an eraser. All of 'em except Mom, she's all right. She's already got her star from The Man Upstairs. She's the best woman in the world — only one I ever met who wasn't a whore." Tuff's eyes tear suddenly. "Mom, I'm sorry Mom I never meant to ever hurt you, you know that. I'm just a dumb Irishman." Everyone in Eddie's is staring now. He's carrying on a full conversation, under the Miller clock, with no one there. "Mom, just don't understand. You just don't understand what it's like. They're all animals down here, nothin but animals."

The bartender is eyeing Tuff nervously, wiping the bar over and over in the same spot. He knows the biggest trouble in the world is an off duty cop with a short fuse. He'd like to cut Tuff off, but he's afraid that will just set him going. so he serves up another whiskey and beer hoping it will miraculously put him to sleep. But no — now Tuff is pronouncedly mimicing the conversation of the table next to him. Three dudes are ready to pounce on him. The bartender fumbles a beer and nods to the corner. Tuff ascends out of his chair, pushing it away with his thighs. He steps back, away from the table and in one long continuous balletic motion he takes off his wrinkled suit jacket, leaving his revolver on his hip. He sits down again. Cock of the walk. Lingering doubts are put to rest; he *is* a cop. The three dudes a table away sink back into their seats.

Tuff tilts his head and glances over at them again, measuring them by their liquor. Tuff rises again, arrogantly, and crosses the floor to the bartender, showing no trace of a limp, now. "Say friend, I got a little problem thought maybe you could help me with?"

"Yea?" the bartender cocks his head and waits, not looking through Tuff so much as beyond him. He's not wiping the bar anymore.

Tuff's hands move slow but definite, unbuckling something the bartender can't see but doesn't need to.

"Hold this," Tuff says putting down his revolver, badge and wallet.

The bartender half-yawns from nerves — says "Hey man, yea, but here" as he shoves Tuff a shot and chaser on the house.

Tuff glowers at him. Turns around and in a stately oratorically ghetto voice addresses the bar: "Which one of you black mother-fuckers wants to meet me outside?"

For a moment, time stands still. "Is Red Evans been around? Cause you tell him there ain't nothin between him and Tuffy Powell now but air and opportunity. Come on now. I'll take you one by one or I'll take you all at the same time. It don't matter."

Again silence. Then two young bucks and a guy with a sweeping scar issuing from behind his right ear usher Tuff through the kitchen and out the back door.

In the alley the rats leap out of trash cans and waddle into holes in the wall — into mounds of dirt that are really mounds of mud-covered rubbish. Tuff wheels about unloading a massive right, sending the tallest one's head bounding off the brick wall. As he turns for the other two — to face them — something hard and flat blinds him, wiping the left side of his face over to the right. Tuff spins and the wall and the cans and the door and a few lighted windows across the way whirl diagonally before he lands, collapsing a pile of garbage and pallets, sending several rats squealing. Besides his face, they showed unexplainable mercy, breaking only one rib.

It was daylight before he came to. Pain that finally brought him to the surface. If he had had to follow his nose to get out of the alley he would've walked in a perpetual circle. He had no idea where to start to reconstruct the previous night's events — and how they transpired to leave him in such a heap. Like so many times before, all he remembered was giving his badge and gun to the bartender. He'd have to get them when the place opened. His face felt like an aching bag of rocks. So did his ribs.

When Tuff stepped out of the alley into the light of day, he hailed a taxi. Tuff took it four blocks to Dick's liquors where he got Dick to pay for the fare. Dick invited him into the back room, set him up with a screwdriver and a pint, offered him the last half-smoke, loaned him $20, and suggested he get to the hospital and have that nose attended to. Twenty minutes later, vision restored and back on his feet, Tuff roamed out and hailed another cab.

He took this cab in a two block circle and pulled up again in front of Dick's Liquors. When he came back out with the bottle he had forgotten, the cab was gone. He had figured the cabbie'd know enough to wait. He flagged another. He dropped the bottle getting in the cab. He felt like crying but instead bellowed "get me to L. P. Edwards, 3400 Benning Road. If it costs more than five, pal, shame on you."

About a third of the way across town he told the cabbie to wait while he went to get a pint at Buy-Rite. A couple blocks later he told the driver to pull over again. The vodka had started taking effect about a half hour ago and now he was even losing track of the pain. He rolled down his window and called over one of three bums hanging out across from a 24-hour Pay-Less gas station.

"Say Governor, make some change?"

The forward-most bum homed shakily up to the window nodding his head like a retriever, or a setter.

"Get me an orange drink out of one of those machines over there and keep the change." He palmed the guy a quarter for a twenty cent drink. The guy hobbled across the street right up to the orange drink button.

When he came back and passed the can safely through the open window without hitting any of the window frame, Tuff thanked him. The bum dallied. Tuff told the cab driver to wait a second before going, and he mixed himself a drink which he took in three quick gulps. The bum was hoping for something to drink but Tuff reached out and shook his hand instead.

"What's your name?"

"Chet" he said.

"Tuffy Powell, here. D.C. Police — Third District. Anything I can ever do for you just ask, hear? If you ever need a problem maybe I can help you out. Here's another deuce for you Governor, go and get yourself a taste." Tuff turned to the cabbie, "You don't got this meter running do you?" The cab rocked out of PARK and continued on.

Tuff reached L. P. Edwards about 3:00 in the afternoon. Dan was out on the lot with a customer. Tuff used this time to send a kid for a couple of cans of Donald Duck from the store around the corner. When Dan got back to the office-trailer and saw Tuff's nose he immediately called a cab and went *with* him to the Washington Hospital Center. When they saw Tuff, the first thing the nurses asked was how long had he been waltzing around town like that. When he had sobered up — by morning — they escorted him into the emergency room. Tuff was sorry he had signed those authorization forms for gas and all. He should have let them fix it when he was drunk — what if he never came to again? As Tuff sank deeper and deeper into sleep he heard the Doctor remind him from the end of a long tunnel "I count thirteen separate breaks, Mr. Powell. You seem to live an active life. We're going to re-break it in those places and, ah, set it straight once and for all." Tuff tried to shake his head no; call it all off. Then, he saw a giant woodpecker walking up the front lawn of his mother's house.

The next two days were heaven. Tuff put #2 down next to everything he ordered on the menu. He had a nurse, Sally, rub his back twice a day. He had "Green Acres" on TV. Most importantly he had Demoral to make the pain subside. He never remembered hurting so much. Not even when that Puerto Rican had tried to gouge his eye out over at Benbow's on Connecticut Avenue.

It wasn't until the third day that Tuff's luck ran out. A new doctor, one he had never seen before and didn't like from first glance, examined his chart for all of two seconds and concluded to the nurse right behind him "There's no reason for *him* to be here either. He can go home at noon."

Tuff gathered his few belongings, cursing to himself. He started calling the doctor who had released him Dr. Egghead because he was bald. As Tuff approached the front doors of the lobby he noticed the windows streaming with water from the downpour. Even though it was early afternoon, it was violently dark. Tuff planned to take a cab to his mother's. He could stay with her the two days until payday; then Jerry Farkle, who had taken care of the badge and gun and put in for Tuff's sick leave, could bring his paycheck and the other things home to the apartment that night.

Right before he reached the front doors, a doctor, who seemed to be familiar with Tuff, intercepted him in a mild mannered way, "Do you have someone who's picking you up?" he asked, very concerned, eyeing the giant mask over Tuff's nose.

"A cab will do fine."

"Do you think that would be a good idea? To get that thing wet? Anyway we don't like patients on medication to travel out of here alone. I'm sure there's someone you could call who could come pick you up."

"You don't know me pal, I can make it. I'll take a cab." Tuff grumbled, bulling his way through the double set of doors; then making his way to the nearest cab. "Goddamned bugger-catcher" Tuff muttered, tugging at the part of the bandage under his nose.

Since he had been dry for close to three days he had the cab drop him off at a small little shopping center not far from the hopsital. He figured he better stop while he could still afford to. The shopping center housed a dry cleaner, a fabric store, a carpet clearinghouse, a bar and a liquor store. He bought a pint and went into the bar to grab a quick chaser or three and then down some of the whiskey. He sat in there the better part of an hour,

watching them play pool in the backroom but mostly trying to forget the pain.

He hated to get up, but he was getting to the end of the pint. "What the hell," he decided at the last moment. "Hey pal, one more for the road." The bartender took it in stride. Tuff gunned it.

It was still dark, and drizzling heavily outside. He had spent his cab money. He hated to show up and stick her with the bill. At least it wasn't pouring. He stepped off the curb into the asphalt lot and headed for the road. Under his feet, rainbowed slicks of oil swirled outward in all directions. He stuck out his thumb, pulled the brim of his wool hat down to better shield his face, and in ten minutes a pickup swung over. It was driven by a wiry redneck with a leather-visored cap on and a body shirt exposing half a tatoo.

"Where you heading to?" Tuff asked as he struggled with the door to close it.

"Montgomery Hills."

"Say, Monkey Hills, you're my right-hand man. I'm going to Silver Spring."

"Gonna kill the whore," the redneck stated matter-of-factly, pulling a giant wrench from beneath the driver's seat. He had gaps in his teeth. They fueled each others' anger to the Maryland-D.C. line.

As the truck pulled up to his mother's — he noticed the kitchen light on in back — as well as the livingroom light on in front. He pointed out the house. They stopped. Tuff — more out of showmanship than serious intent — wished the redneck luck in killing his wife, and assured him he was gonna lay his own wife out as soon as he felt a little better and got the mask off so he wasn't quite so conspicuous. He hopped out of the cab of the truck. "Say, pal, 'preciate the lift." Tuff slammed the door and ascended the front steps. He opened the screen door, slid in and rapped on the corner panel closest to the knob. Christ Almighty, do I have to fish for my keys? "Open the Goddam door."

Tuff slowly dropped himself into the captain's chair near the front desk. His face was flushed red in exquisite agony. He was raging one minute, the next minute he was too calm. Mom was hovering several feet fron Tuff under the arch between the livingroom and dining room. Her sixty-eight year old heart rifting another inch or so. Tuff had a two-track mind. He wanted to get his gun, go back to that bar — Eddie's — and blow away the dudes who broke his nose. And he also knew he had to quit the way he was living. He was too old. Suddenly he's sober. "It's gonna kill me. There was three of 'em Blake — it took me two days to remember that — and I got the first one . . . I got him (he chokes up) but I never saw it coming. Never saw it at all, Blake. I'm slowing down. I can't do what I used to do. I've been broken up too many times. It's gonna kill me."

I don't know exactly what to say. Mom does. "Then stop, Jack. Please stop. It's no good the way you're living. Every time the phone rings whether I'm upstairs or in the basement or in the backyard I'm always afraid it's going to be someone who's calling to tell me something's happened to you. Please stop. If not the drinking, at least the fighting. It's so senseless."

Tuff stares at her mesmerized. The same way he stares at the TV or the washing machine. Several seconds after she quits speaking, Tuff rustles to life. "I ain't gonna let 'em do it to me, Blake. Nobody pops Tuffy Powell like this and gets away with it. Not no Puerto Rican, not no half-assed jitterbug like Red Evans. Nobody. Blake, lend me $10."

"Naw, Tuff, you don't want to go down there." I hold him lightly — hoping to God he won't decide he *does* want to get up.

"Say, Blake, see if you can pull off this one strip of bandage right here" he says indicating with the tips of his fingers a strip running right under his nostrils. "I don't know who designed this contraption, but it sure does itch. I never saw Dr. Egghead till the last day but I'm sure he had something to do with it. You should've seen this guy, Blake . . ."

I glanced over at Mom and she is faintly shaking her head.

"C'mon, Tuff, leave it alone. Can't you just leave things the way they should be for once. Do you always have to screw around with everything. Just leave it be, it's not supposed to come off."

"He's not even listening. He's fooling with a corner of the tape trying to work it off slow but sure. He says: "Say, Blake, come here a second" — like he's trying to trick me — like he hasn't asked me yet."

Mom is beckoning me into the kitchen with her hand. "Can't you give him some marijuana to smoke to calm him down? Would that calm him down?" She is looking at me like a hopeful school girl at her wits' end and bone weary.

"Yea sure. But he's rather have that bottle of rum hidden up in you cedarchest. Her face lights up when she remembers, and with her fingers fidgeting at the hip of her slacks, she runs upstairs, lifting her eyes the whole way, as if that will get the bottle out of the cedarchest that much quicker.

Tuff isn't too wild about the pot but he happily accepts the Bacardi's. I talk him into another Demerol: my energy waning. "Blake, see if you can't get this bugger catcher off me — I think it's supposed to be able to come off here."

We smoke another joint. He complains the whole time about how it doesn't seem to *move* him. Finally, he slows down. I get him up the stairs and into the small bedroom. He livens a bit. "Mom," he says, "you and Blake go on to bed. I got a few people I gotta see."

Mom, exhausted as she is, is wired live as an exposed cord. "Jack. Please."

Tuff agrees to try and sleep. Mom goes in and lays awake staring at the ceiling. I go in the other bedroom and fall into a black sleep.

Within an hour she is shaking me by the arm rocking me rudely out of some dream I never have remembered. "Blake, Blake, come in here please; see what he's done. I don't know what I'm going to do. There's just no end to it." I walk into the room and am stunned. Tuff is sitting on the edge of the bed part sheepish, part mad. The packing is spiralling down out of the left nostril all the way to the freshly varnished floor.

"I had a dream about a giant bugger. Blake, you're looking at me like I'm crazy but I had this dream and — ah — I mean I didn't do it to —"

Mom is in her bedroom dialing the doctor from the phone on her night table.

Tuff agrees to sleep again; somewhat abashed. But in the hour I am awakened again. She is beyond words. I can't imagine what he's done. He's sitting on the bed the same way but something is slightly off that I can't put my finger on. In two seconds I realize

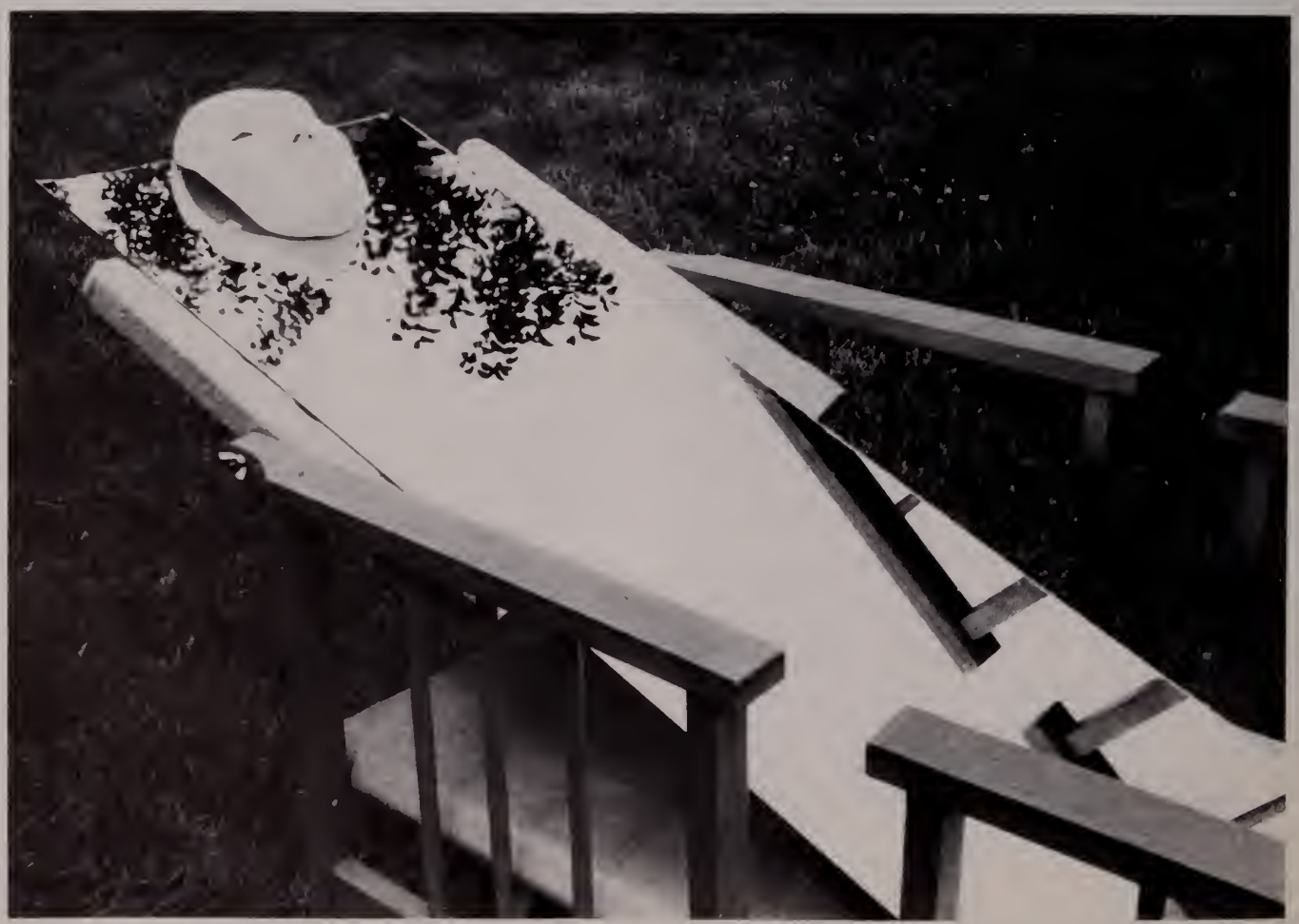
it's the packing. It's half its old length and burned to a black fragile lace, dangling about his knees.

"I, uh, looked for a scissors but there weren't none around. I tried to sleep but I kept rolling over on it and pulling more out. So I used the lighter —"

Mom is in her room calling our older brother Frank — probably the most responsible of us all, but forty miles away. "Frank, I was so scared. I smelled something burning and when I walked in it was flaming up towards his face, Frank, and it was nearly burning his face and he didn't even feel it. I'm terrified he's going to kill himself — or set the house on fire."

Tuff and I in the little bedroom keep looking at each other. We exchange no words, but an invisible inaudible bond connects us. I shake my head slowly. He starts to flare up, curse — start on one of his set tirades, say something like "Blake, even if you don't know the first thing about surviving in this world," but he swells back into sobriety; dropping his head in his hands. His elbows support his head and his fingers massage his temples. "Nothin's never hurt me like this, Blake." He lifts his head and for once he looks at me as if to tell me that yes he has understood all along what we've been telling him; he has understood it's killing him. Then Tuff, looking not so much through me as beyond me, says in a discernably measured, sober, matter-of-fact tone " Blake, you know I love you and Mom and everyone. I ain't gonna let nobody down. You feel like makin' a pot of that Mr. Coffee?"

*Bill Griffiths*



*Eileen O'Tousa*

*Michael Pechacek*

## Before You Leave

Take me sailing with you. I could help raise the sheets to the wind.
The autumn ocean must be turning silver in the waning sun. Fish
must swim invisibly in their own color

Sail me away from the sand and the street. I can't see through
the canopy of trees. You would remind me of autumn when the rowing
reddens your back, and your spine and ribs form the inside of a leaf.

Teach me the words for turn and pull. How simply we could speak.
Tell me what to call the quiet ground far below us or the movement
of water when it pushes away, then touches itself again behind us.

Please take me sailing with you. My belief in this land washes
out and in. This city is too deep to wade through. In the middle
of the ocean I could turn again and again — from sun, to wind, to water,
to you.

*Kathy Bearden*

## Rainbow in Winter

You were to be christened *Harmonica,*
but there was a leak in your bilge
and the teak to be oiled —
there was no time for champagne.
Your transom bore the word "Heiwa,"
from a previous owner. Japanese for peace
I heard. It meant nothing; we called you
the "Rainbow," your brand name,
like our Dodge and our Ford —
You were the "Rainbow."

Your hull against the ice,
a sparrow
huddled in all its humble
for the lord of winter.
Your lines, faithful
to the groan of wood, grinned
down the pier

We sold you in the winter,
a thin January day,
when the bight of your rig
wore cuts in our fingers.
It was not a full red sky,
only the gesture of rose.
We bought a bigger boat.
It would have a name,
to be sure. Something musical.

*David G. Swerdlow*

*Dick Dodad*

*Dorothea Chandler*

# Dream in Early April, 1980

It is late afternoon by now as I walk out around the fish-hook of the strand curling around so that the coast is in front of me and the ocean in back and the waves between me and the land crashing, crashing, but never amounting to what they seem and for some odd reason it is the thought of the women in my life that haunts me — has prodded me to come out here — the ones who are gone now who I can only hug like air. As the afternoon winds down for good I feel like one of them should be with me. Down the strand from me are the jeeps and land rovers surf fishing — but strange, the farther I walk they keep the same distance from me — tingling laughter of men and women — just out of reach, and I feel even more alone. The sun is going down faster now and I notice the shore has retreated, given way to the water in between. The waves, not much bigger, now, seem more dangerous, and the ocean looms more awful than ever behind me. From both sides, the strand I am on is being eaten away. The land rovers don't seem to notice — as if they know a way out, but the farther I walk toward them the more they keep their distance from me — without moving. The water slaps and curls and punds and the strand I had walked out on to get here is gone. Just like the women in my life have taken themselves away or been cast away by me as if I knew not what I had, (or they woke one day and found I was a dream). The sun is well nigh down now and panic slaps and curls and washes the insides of my stomach. I am no sure whether to keep heading to the land rovers or to recross the strand now lying beneath the shallow churning water. Past the shore, further inland in the distance, the horizon disappears and the water in between seems more than ever of a piece. The women of my life seem far, far away. They do not see me. Their thoughts do not go with mine. They work their hands to the bone and their faces flare like oil lamps when their men come home to dinner.

*William Griffiths*

*Maxie Woods, Jr.*

# The Ice, the Orchid, the Gown:
## A Woman's Memories

Our house was of stone. Low to the pine-shaded ground, mossy in the cool places, near chalky where the sun always teased. And it was an old house, full of whispers and remembrances. It was an appropriate setting setting for Mama, who was slight and angular and beautiful. My earliest memory is of the flour on her delicate hands as she passed me a cup of milk in the kitchen, the powder prints of her fingers on the sides of the plastic mug, her voice cautioning me not to spill, "Careful, Alice, hold on!"

Around the hill from us was a fast, foaming section of river. If the light was right in the early morning the mist off the rocks there would shimmer into a rainbow. I remember crawling out of my bed and sneaking out of the house to huff in the cold air and skip through those pines to the river, hoping that this time I would return home with a bucket brimming with gold from the near end of that rainbow. Even when I grew past the age of leprechauns I would sometimes go running to the river just for the beauty of it. When I was fourteen, early on a May morning, I found Mama there, perched up on a rock and looking younger than I had ever seen her. I hid in a shadow and watched her braid her hair up into its familiar roll. Then I slid home before she saw me. It pleased me that Mama knew the rainbow too.

My Pa was mostly a stranger, "A man with an itch," Mama used to say. He wasn't home more than four or five months out of any year. A big man with a square face and square palms and square shoulders. Isaac Castle. He took jobs where he could, mostly field work so he could follow the harvesting from one end of the country to the other. When he was home he seemed more a guest than a real part of our lives.

I was seventeen when Pa showed up with the old woman. It was a late afternoon in early February and I was alone in the house. The light had that muted clarity only born of clouds reflecting on snow, the light of winter in the hills.

"Where's Ruth?" Pa asked as he helped the woman into a chair. I blinked and he repeated it, "Alice, darlin', where's your Mama?"

"Pa." I was staring at the woman. She seemed pained with age. "Mama works at the bakery until five."

"You run and get her." He tossed me a smile. "But before you go . . . This here is your grandmother." He leaned close to the bony skull and burning eyes. "Ma, this is your granddaughter, Alice."

She glared at me for a moment then peered up at Pa. "You sure she's really yours, Issac?"

"Ma! Alice is my legal-born child!" He coughed, "Don't you go saying such things in front of Ruth now. Alice, run fetch your Mama."

I pulled on my coat and squirmed into my boots as fast as I could. It was a mile into town and I ran the whole way. As I crossed the bridge my boots made a quick thumping, like a woodpecker against a dead tree. I started thinking that Pa could have picked Mama up in his truck if he were in such a hurry.

Sinclair's bakery was on Main Street, two blocks in from the bridge. Little bells rang as I shoved the door open. Missy Sinclair was sitting by the cash register and her smile tightened a bit when she saw me. "Why, Alice! How nice to see you."

"Came to . . . fetch my Mama." I was probably quite a sight. I hadn't put on my hat so my hair had been flying and the cold always blotched my freckled skin horribly. Jonathan Anders was by the counter, I'm sure I'd interrupted his flirting with Missy, and he was making a point to choke so I would know how much he wanted to laugh. I tried to breathe normally. "Missy, it's important. My Pa . . . sent me to fetch her."

"Oh? Your Pa's home?"

I moved to the swinging doors that led to the kitchen. "I suppose she's back here?" I swung through without waiting for Missy's reply. I loved that bakery kitchen, it was always warm, the air always sweet with bread or pastry. At that moment Mama was sitting with Mrs. Sinclair drinking coffee, while loaves of raisin bread swelled in the ovens. Both women looked up with smiles as I entered. I curtseyed. "Afternoon, Mrs. Sinclair." She nodded to me and I turned to Mama. "Pa is home."

Mama smoothed her apron down in her lap. "You didn't need to run all the way here without a hat to tell me that, Alice." I knew she wanted me to behave more like a lady, after all I was nearly eighteen. But she hadn't heard all the news.

"Mama, he's brought my grandmother with him. She's up at the house right now."

"Oh, Jesus!" She sprang out of her chair in a panic. Then she flushed at her loose tongue. "Mrs. Sinclair, I beg your pardon. I don't know . . . Alice, are you sure?"

"Yes, Ma'am." My voice was very small. "Pa sent me to fetch you."

Mrs. Sinclair patted Mama's arm. "Well, Ruth, you go on home. I can take care of this." She waved at the shiny ovens. "But I'll be needing you tomorrow." Mrs. Sinclair smiled at me. "I hope Isaac will be home long enough to come and visit Tom and me."

Mama was moving very slowly, she made me feel like jumping up and down. I shoved my hands up into my coat sleeves like a Chinaman. Finally Mama picked up her pocketbook. "Come along, Alice."

We went out through the front, silently passing Missy and Jonathan. I guess Mama never heard Missy say, "Bye, Mrs. Castle," because if she had I can't imagine her not being polite in return.

The walk home was longer than I thought it could be. Mama said nothing. At the bridge I had ample time to notice how the ice sp;ayed its fingers in the center of the water as though reaching tomake a solid clasp from bank to bank. On the way up the road I watched the late afternoon sun dazzle on the icicles, and I searched the bare branches of oak and lush branches of pine for birds or squirrels. When I looked over at Mama she appeared as blank faced as a mannequin in a store window but both her gloved hands were tightly fisted on her pocketbook, holding it centered to her body. She seemed very pale.

We turned up the path toward the house and Mama absentmindedly patted the side of Pa's truck. She finally spoke, "How

does she look?"

"Real old. Real skinny."

"She's sick then."

"She seemed aware of everything, not weak."

Mama laughed in a brittle way. "Did she say anything to you, Alice?"

The wool collar of my coat was rasping on the back of my neck. "No, Mama."

'Mm." She looked over at me, touched my arm. We stopped walking. The house was a shadow's length away. "Alice, your Pa's mother and I have never . . . She has always been bitter about Issac marrying me. She must be very poorly to have consented to come here. I would guess she's here to die, child." Mama paused and I watched her breath puff in a frail silver cloud between us. "He'll leave her with us and it will not be pleasant. You understand me, Alice?"

"Yes, Mama."

"Let's go in."

We walked to the door and I opened it. Mama entered and walked right to Pa. She kissed him. "Good to have you home, Issac."

"Ruth." Pa glanced at the old woman, "I'm sure Alice told you . . . "

"Certainly." She turned. "Hello, Elizabeth."

The woman who was my grandmother spit on the floor. My eyes leapt to Mama. She was stiffened to a stone. Pa sucked a loud breath.

"Clean it up." Mama sounded poisonous. She tossed a hankie into the old woman's lap. "This is my house. You will never act in that foul manner again in my house."

Grandmother laughed and wiped the thick spittle from the floor at the same time.

So it began.

The next morning we had had freezing rain that left the snow all sheathed in nature's glass. The pines were encased in ice, reflecting the sunlight in little stars all around the yard. When I got to the kitchen Pa was standing by the window with a cup of coffee.

"Hey, princess." He grinned at me. "You're up mighty early."

"Thought I'd fix breakfast."

"You see this?" Pa gestured at the world outside. There was a quivering of awe in his voice.

"Yeah."

"Beauty is all around us, Alice." His words were slow, as though he were speaking to himself. "But somedays . . . days like today, it'll dizzy you. The beauty brings you pain, like a love pain, and it worms into you and nearly poisons you." Pa was staring at the pines. "You listen for the calling of it. You do anything to be near it 'til you end up spending a whole day just hypnotized by a spider weaving her wonder."

I was only half listening, catching more of the deep resonance of his voice than the meaning of his words. He touched my cheek, "How's your Mama been lately, Alice?"

I tried to read his face but couldn't. "She works hard."

"At the bakery."

"Yeah, Pa." He seemed odd. I turned toward the stove thinking I should put on some more coffee. "How have you been?" I asked him.

"Well, been with your grandmother the past couple weeks. Before that I was all the way out in California—great weather." He looked into his cup.

I busied myself with the coffee, eggs and bacon. Mama was stirring in her room and from the far side of the house I could hear the muffled sound of the old woman coughing. Pa walked to the table in the next room and sat down. Soon Mama joined him and they began talking in low tones. They were discussing Grandmother. I missed the beginning of the conversation but they didn't stop when I brought breakfast in.

"So she has . . . what?" Mama said, her elbows up on the table.

"I can't remember the name of it. Some Latin thing. It's eating at her lungs."

"Consumption." Mama muttered, reaching for the plate of eggs. "I don't want her here, Isaac."

"She's staying. Ma is not dying in a place full of strangers." Pa wanted absolutely no comment on the subject. In the pause we could all hear Grandmother coughing a few rooms away.

"You staying too, Isaac?" Mama asked quietly, "You going to help us with her?"

"I'll be here as long as I can, Ruth. But come spring I have a contract to honor in Georgia for planting. People are counting on me."

I had a piece of bacon between my fingers and Mama watched me chew the end of it, but she really wasn't focused on me at all. I fidgeted in my chair. Pa looked at me too. "You understand, don't you, Alice? People are counting on me." His large hands gripped the edge of the table and he pushed his chair out and away from us. With Mama and me watching, Pa got up and left the room.

Just as expected, when the hyacinths bloomed in late March Pa left us again. Mama calmly packed him some food in heavy brown paper and I walked him out to the truck and waved goodbye until he was out of sight. That afternoon, after school, I walked out to the river and found David Wyatt there with a fishing pole. David wore spectacles and was in my class. He had helped me with my algebra once or twice. But here by the thaw-swollen river, he seemed no part of books or classes.

He eyed me with surprise. "Why, if it isn't Alice Castle!"

"David. " He was in my special place. His can of bait was sitting on my favorite rock.

"What are you doing here, Alice?"

"I live just through there." I gestured at the pines, tugged my sweater across my chest. Then I turned to go.

"Oh, don't go. I'd like the company." He sounded sincere and I did know him from school. I really didn't want to return to the house and watch Grandmother rocking back and forth.

A squirrel began chattering and clacking from a nearby pine. I searched and found him against the trunk, thumping his tail like a a banner against the tree. I smiled and turned around and I guess David thought I was smiling at him because he grinned back. I frowned.

"Have you caught anything?" I asked.

"No, not yet."

"You'd have better luck up or down stream in the deeper water."

"Ah. But it's to much more beautiful here." He set his pole down and moved the can off my rock. Then he smiled and bowed in an elaborately graceful way. "Will you sit down?"

I squinted and moved to sit on another rock a few feet away. He laughed and sat himself. We looked at each other. My hair was flying from the breeze off the river. I tried to tuck it behind my ears. David Wyatt was staring at me. "Why are you looking at me that way?" I demanded.

"You look pretty." He replied.

"Huh. Fuzzy hair and freckles. Real pretty."

"It suits you."

I laughed and nodded to him, "Guess it has to." I bit my lower lip. "You haven't been around here long, have you?"

"Almost a year."

"That long?" His hair was lush and black, curling and waving around his face. His spectacles seemed like gold halos around his brown eyes. I had never really noticed him at school but here he was in my favorite place with his wide shoulders and a worn fishing pole, watching me hard as though memorizing my features.

"You're not going with Bobby Rand anymore, are you, Alice?"

"What? No. Not for a while now."

He leaned down and picked up a pebble, crossed his thumb over the smooth surface of the stone once or twice and then looked back at me, "I knew you lived up here."

"It's no secret." I stood up, "I have to get back and start dinner." I had that quiver in my stomach that always came before a boy kissed me; it confused and pleased me to have that feeling from David. "I'll see you in school tomorrow, OK?" I started toward the trees.

"Um. Alice?" He called me back, "Could I call on you at home this Friday? Would your Mama mind?" He still had the pebble, was tossing it from hand to hand. "I'd like to very much."

I could feel the hot blush along my neck. "That would be fine. Great. You come by around seven, the house is real easy to find. We always have cake and coffee around that time. You would be welcome." It was a little awkward, I think I bobbed a curtsey before I scampered away through the trees hearing David's pleased laughter echo behind me.

And that's when I fell in love.

When I got back to the house the blush must have still been on my face because Grandmother looked up at me and with typical bite said, "Well, Miss Rosy-cheeks, finally home, are you?"

"I was sitting out by the river for awhile." I replied. I started across the room and tripped, nearly falling, over the throw-rug.

"And clumsy!" Grandmother cackled. She poked a knotted finger at me. "What have you been up to? Huh? Maybe you should come nearer so I can smell your breath."

"Leave me be." I said wearily, wishing for at least the thousandth time she were gone. I took a deep breath, "What would you like for dinner?"

"Whatever," she replied, then added, "but wash your hands good before you make it."

Later, when Mama had returned home and the three of us wee seated at the table, things were very quiet. Mama seemed exhausted. Grandmother kept picking half-chewed lumps of food from her mouth and smearing them on the border of her plate. I tried not to look up at her. Eventually Mama turned to me, "How was your day, dear?"

"It was OK, Mama."

The old woman cut in, "You whore!" she hissed. "Just like you Ruth, this one was out all afternoon whoring with any as would take her."

The whole space deadened. Grandmother ran a sticky finger along her hairy upper lip. She whispered, "Just like you, Ruth." Then Mama, sudden as lightening, set a slap across her face.

Grandmother screamed, "Bitch! How dare you strike me?"

"Isaac himself would have hit you for that." Mama retorted.

I heard the sound of the river in my mind and carefully set down my fork. Then Grandmother began to cry. The old woman curled her shoulders around her and rocked in her chair. The hair on the top of her head was a mere dry fuzziness. I could see the grey skin pulled tightly over her skull. She drooled a breaking ribbon into her lap.

Mama's hands were shaking as she began clearing the table. I automatically moved to help her. We got all the dishes into the kitchen and Mama quietly pulled an apron around her waist.

Grandmother's gasping for breath had led to a coughing fit. I looked through the doorway toward her. She was coughing into her dinner napkin and I saw the white of the worn fabric blossom with a spread of the old woman's blood.

"Mama." I whispered, "She's coughing up blood."

"Child, she's been doing that since long before she got here." Mamas replied, "Her curse that God won't take her quick."

It was the first time I really knew she was dying. "Mama," I said, "our curse too."

My birthday was the week after graduation, late in June. Pa hadn't made it home to see me finish school. He didn't arrive for my eighteenth birthday either. But the weather was beautiful.

David and I had a picnic dinner by the river, at about the same place where I had noticed him a couple of months before. David talked on and on about his grandfather's farm upstate, the land he would inherit one day. And I could see the dreams dancing on his face as he spoke.

When the sun started to set I realized how late it had grown. "Lord, David, I've got to be getting home. Mama's going to worry."

"Ah, she knows you're with me." He winked. "You're safe."

"I gotta go."

"Wait, Alice." He rummaged in the basket by his side as I stood up. He pulled a white cardboard box out from under a napkin and handed it to me. "This is for you. A surprise."

I grinned at him and he stood up. "What is it?"

"Open it, silly."

I pulled off the lid and poked a finger into the pink tissue paper. When I pushed the tissue back I found a flower. A miracle of a flower. I picked it out of the box and tenderly cupped my hands around it, holding it the way I would hold a newborn kitten.

"An orchid." I breathed. "I've seen these in books."

The blossom was a waxy pink at the ruffled edges and it darkened to a liquid, purple center. I could almost feel it pulsing in my palm. David took his hands and curled them under mine. We stood there for a moment, quietly double-cupping the beauty of it. I thought I would cry.

"Alice?"

"Oh, David. You must have driven thirty miles to get me this." I couldn't believe it. Nobody had ever done so much just to please me. "I don't know what to . . . "

"Alice, school's all behind us and we've got to be planning for life. I want you in my plans." He looked at me with such a flood of loving in his eyes that I felt something near to sorrow, such an

ache. "I want to share my life with you, Alice. Will you marry me?"

Marry. It was my eighteenth birthday. The flower was burning in my hand. "Yes." I whispered, "Yes, I will."

I got back to the house still trembling from David's kiss goodnight. There were sudden clouds skidding across the sky, rhythmically blotting out the swollen moon. A rabbit, startled by my approach, ran across the path, so close to me I could see the fear-rolling white of her eyes.

When I drew close to the house the door swung open and Mama stood silhouetted in the light. Her back was to me but I heard her voice clearly from across the yard. "Why don't you just die?"

And I heard the old woman's reply too. "Oh! That would make things easier for you, wouldn't it, Ruth? She couldn't find out then. She would never discover what you were. Her precious Mama! That's why I wasn't allowed to come visit. That's why I never saw her when she was growing up."

I leaned against a tree feeling the weakness leaking to my legs. I couldn't breathe normally. The box with the orchid in it fell to the ground, cushioned to a silence by the bed of pine needles.

Mama's voice came like a knife, "Elizabeth! Why don't you die!" Then there was a breaking, the sound of a sob. "I hate you! I wish you were dead." And Mama turned from the house and ran, stumbling, down the path to the road.

My body was a machine. I walked to the front window, looked in to see Grandmother sitting in Pa's chair with the lamp on just above her. She leaned forward, toward the door, screaming, "Maybe I haven't told her yet, but don't you think I won't! I won't die before I tell Alice about you. Do you hear me, Ruth, and you can't either. And you stole my son from me!"

Mama had disappeared down the path. The old woman began coughing and I could see that she didn't have a handkerchief. She was spitting the blood right up into her hands. Blood in glossy clots swam in her palms, settled in thick beads between her fingers.

I moved from the window just as the moon cleared itself of its cloud veiling. I saw the gleaming white of my cardboard box, my orchid, resting on the ground. I went to pick it up, my hands rattling with a sudden palsy. I had to find Mama.

In a few minutes I found her sitting on a tree stump out by the road. She wiped at her eyes when she saw me. "Alice, darling, where's David?"

"He went home." I looked at her for a moment. "You OK, Mama?"

"Sure." She smiled. "I guess I'm just missing your Pa." She pointed at the box in my hands. "What do you have there?"

"Oh. David gave me an orchid." I worked the lid off the box and showed her, "He wants me to marry him."

"Oh, baby." Mama threw her arms around me and I could feel the length of her thinness against my softer body. "I'm so happy for you!"

My legs were quivering slightly to support me. "You don't even know if I accepted him." I murmured.

Mama stepped back, still holding my shoulders, and peered into my face. "But of course you did! Settling down with a nice boy like David. Life as a farmer's wife. An honorable life! Of course you accepted him."

I nodded my head and she smiled but tears were flickering along her lashes. I forced a trembling laugh, "You know, Mama, that rhymes. A farmers wife-an honorable life."

"Oh, Alice it's everything I always wanted for you."

And I realized I couldn't ask her. We would never speak of it. "Mama?"

"Yes, dear?"

"David and I will be getting married real soon. Do you think Pa could be here for the wedding?"

Mama and I found a second-hand wedding dress two weeks after David proposed. The dress was full and white, shimmering in the summer sun the afternoon I tried it on for Mama to hem. It was Saturday. The whole world was smelling of honeysuckle and roses. While Mama searched for her box of pins, I ran outdoors. In a spot of sunlight I swirled the skirt around me, spinning it out in a blinding cup.

Then Mama cried to me from the house. "Alice, Alice, child, come quickly!" she sounded afraid. "Change out of that. You have to run for the doctor. Something has happened to her."

I ran the few yards to the door. Mama touched my arm and we turned into the dark hallway. I could smell bread baking in the oven, could feel a slight breeze moving through the house. We came to the door of the old woman's room. It was ajar and Mama pushed it wide. A sweet breeze flowed in through the open window. Mama stayed at the threshold and I walked in.

Grandmother was in bed, a blanket drawn up over her legs. Her right arm was crossed over her chest and I watched her fingers for a moment as they twitched and spasmodically opened and closed into a weak fist. Her left arm was motionless by her side. The whole left side of her face was slack. The eyelid, not fully closed, revealed a slice of thickly glazed white. Her cheek was an empty flap, the mouth drooping open to allow a thin dribble of saliva to trickle down her chin. Her right eye followed my movements frantically but I wasn't sure that she saw me. I swung to face Mama.

"Alice, I think it was a stroke." Mama stepped into the room.

"Christ!" I yanked at my wrists. "Mama, what are we supposed to do?"

"Your Pa will be home tomorrow."

I looked at her blankly.

"He phoned the bakery yesterday to tell me. We'll get Dr. Paul now and Isaac will take care of things tomorrow."

"Mama! Christ, Mama, Pa can't do anything. Look at her!"

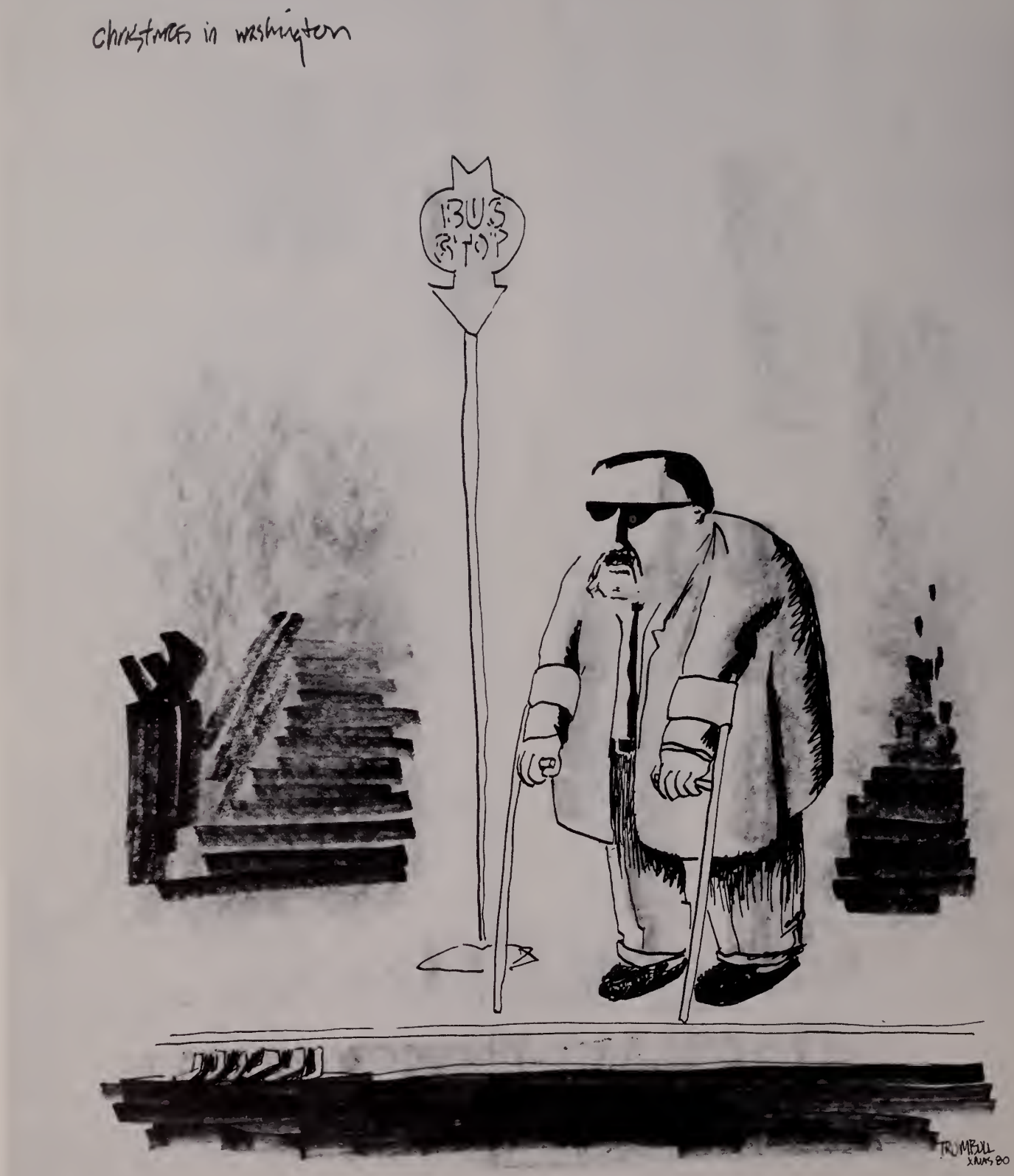
Grandmother's mouth began moving but she made no sound. I was anguished. Mama walked to the bed and took the old woman's right hand between both of hers. "It's all right, Elizabeth. Everything is all right." Mama smoothed the sparse gray hair back from Grandmother's face. She whispered again, "Everything is all right, Elizabeth."

Grandmother made a sound, a sobbing and gulping noise. In the warm stillness of the room it seemed she was trying to speak. Finally she managed, and though the words were garbled they were not difficult to understand. I remember thinking of the sound of thunder.

"Ma?" the old woman gurgled, "Mama? Mama, Mama, Mama." She repeated the comfort of it over and over.

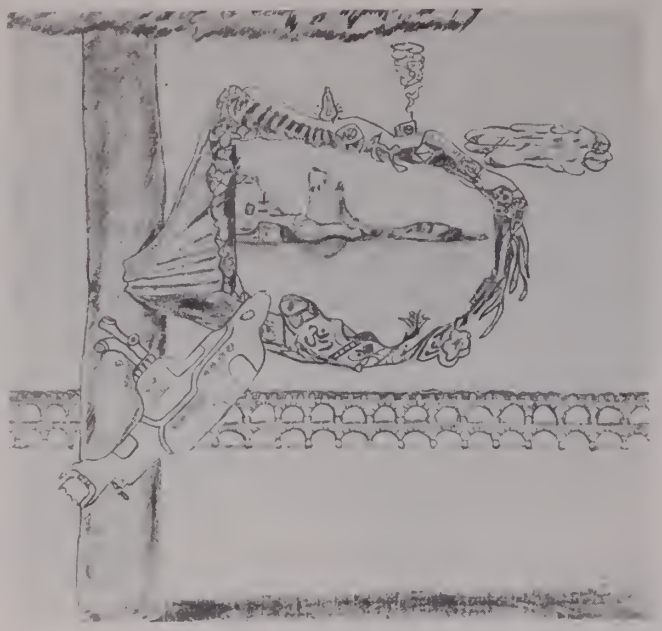
I started to cry, one hand up to the stiff lace at my throat. I looked down at my gown, gleaming and white.

*Kathleen J. Sysma*




*Edward A. Trumbull*

*Eileen O'Tousa*



*Anatole Sucher*

# Poreless Man

The body swells and sighs
but draws no breath.

The eyes are dry. There is no duct
through which a tear might pass.

Talk to him. He cannot speak,
nor even sweat in reply.

There is an unbroken seam
where the mouth would open.

Shave him. The skin
is smooth as glass.

The doctor refuses to examine.
With nowhere to probe he cannot diagnose.

Sleep with him. He blushes and kisses
closed-lipped, but he will never sire.

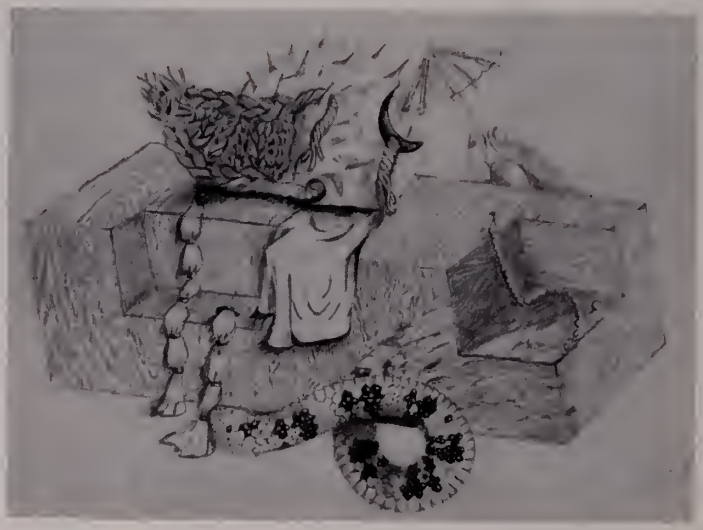
Do not let the children laugh
at the human without orifice.

*Richard Ballard*

*Carl Channell*

*Diana June Nickoloff*

*Susan Loftus*



*Celia Murphy*

*Eileen Colclough*

*Dorothea Chandler*

# Lyric

I have given up the hope of peace,
and now live quick in another place.
What's built or torn will search and cease.
Of this flesh I make a second face.

Gliding through air, his hope to gather
new tools or clothes, another
boy grows up to be his father.
His eyes and hands are paired together.

With gracelessness of limbs I move
obliquely in the face of love.
My tongue, which moors and mouths a praise,
is feathered words, and sweet unease.

The tips of fingers, the palms of hands
touch her. What gathers ends.
The movement of women weights the soul;
I make this spring my fall, my fall.

*Crispin*

*Karen J. Kovacs*

*Tony Green*

*E. Weiss*

## Age, etc

Youth follows a man around like Eurydice—
until he turns around and looks. Then it's all
warm slush on a worn out guitar
    friends applauding,
until finally, like that old man in the next room,
the door stays shut. He follows
wolves bears and dogs to the last cave
in sham instinct. Here there's no lion
to tear and eat the dying flesh, no mother
of beauty, no morning kiss from a root,
only cocks' crows in bedclothes, in glitters
of thread in a priest's robe. Charon
is a bad-breathed fake; the old ferry
is a rented, black shiny ride, and the worms
will bump their little heads on holy installments
of concrete and a few inches of lead.

*David Hall*

## People Food

You rush headfirst down my throat,
a tickle of garments and limbs.
A few hours in the sun
have dried and browned you;
your crisp skin sticks in my teeth.
As your hand slips by
I maneuver a fingernail
like a toothpick with my tongue.
I will save your cool blonde hair
for flossing later.
I bite the buttons off your blouse
and wash them down
with that look in your eyes;
our stomachs cry together
as mine digests yours.
Your belt buckle snags on my lip;
I kiss it free.
I prod your sleepy legs with a sliver
of stainless steel, lightly buttered.
Your footprint on the roof of my mouth
is the last trace
of the meal I make of you.

*Richard Ballard*

*David Hubbard*

## Christopher Winters

a slick whisker of a name
a kid brother slings out
when he can't swear

ice glazes each slide
of your window you wonder
if you'll ever be

a thin Russian
splashing vodka across a Dostoevsky
losing glasses

your hands play
bones into loose bells and lutes
strung with hair

a legacy from the dead musicians
your fingers lace *The Winter's Tale*
like bootlaces

*Pamela Murray*

*Brian James O'Tousa*

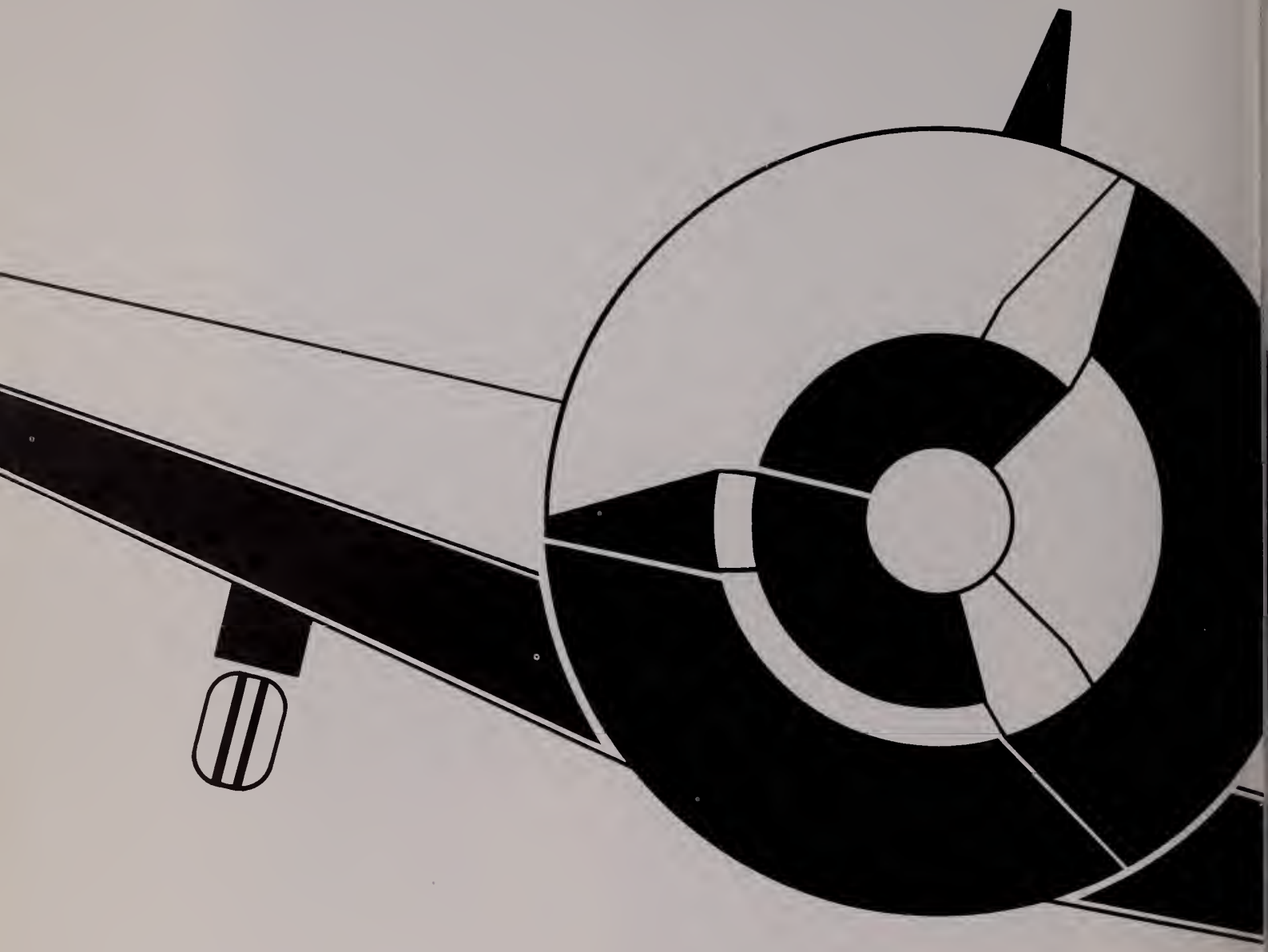
## Firstlight

downward growth of purity
the light is going
some angel-speeded
life
unstyling the broadsweep
of shadow
purist grade—
20 black dilutes to
a grade 16

the curve of beginning
swings full round
again in lifeshine
an inflammation astro-
nomical erupts on
the horizon

creatures of the day
blink awake
nothing escapes being
seen since seeing
seems very akin
to everything

*Robert Bowie*



*Doug Dickson*

# Building A, Room 34

Surrounded by crumpled tissues
she smells like vitamins and sour milk
and wants you to keep
the plaster clock
with the gold angels
and the lions feet.
She made it herself;
it's for you.
You hate it
and will cherish it
forever.
You thank her
and hold your breath
when you bend to kiss her;
she can tell.

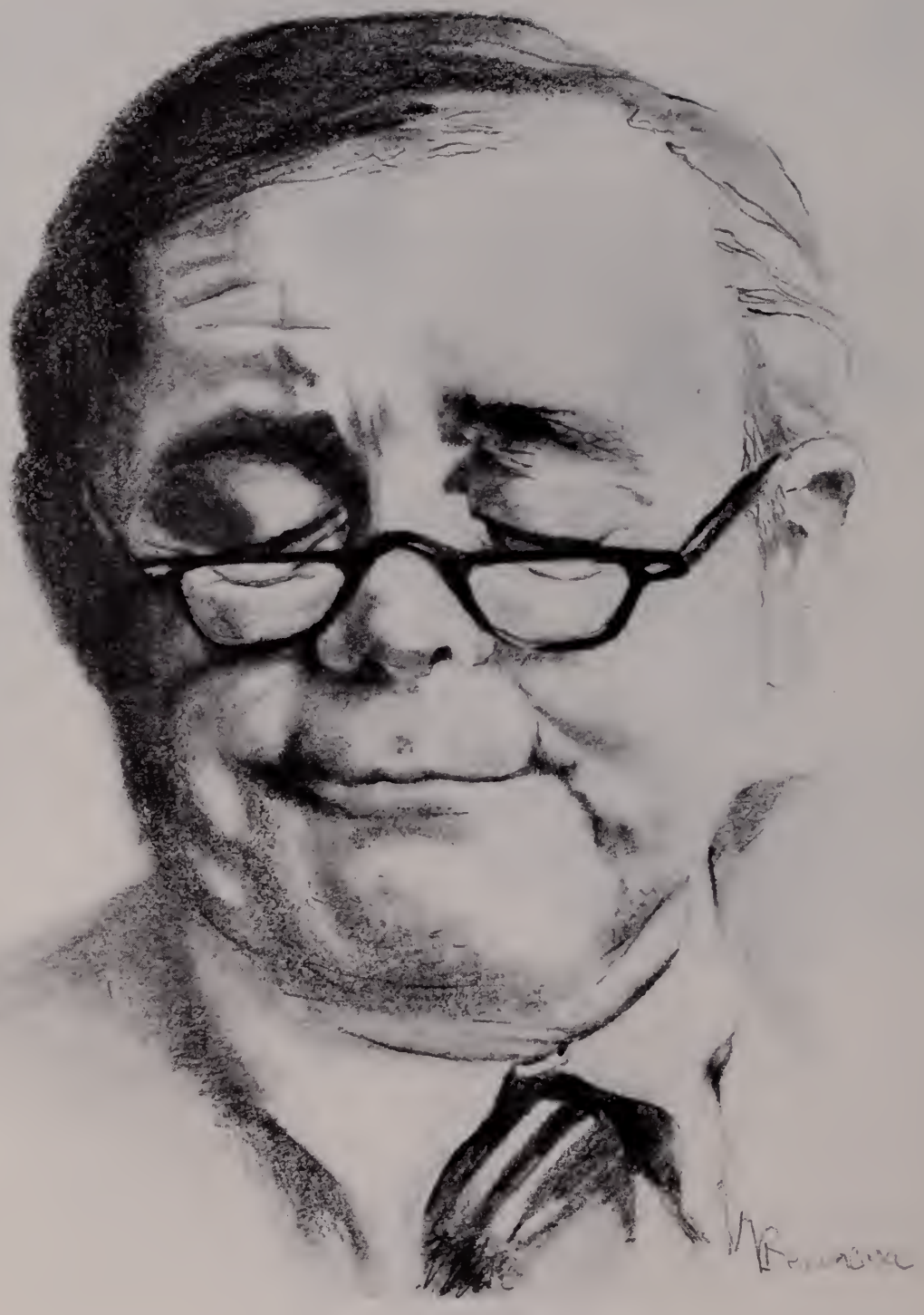
Her tiny body is walled in
by the pill bottles;
hanging bottles.
You ask her how she is
and she says the man in the cap
is very nice.
There is no man.
There is no cap.
Just a little, grey head
being eaten
by the pillows
and the green paint.

You talk about the lovely cards and plants
that were sent to remind her
she won't be around much longer
but they will miss her.
She wants to join the army
and it's very cloudy
but she stares at you
through the clouds
and wants you to stay;
take your cap off.

*Heidi Bohi*

*Claudia Diamond*

*Claudia Diamond*



*Natalie Benincasa*

# Little Girl Lost

A sad tale's best for winter
*(The Winter's Tale; II, i)*

She was too young to see
the fear in his folded hands
as he knelt by the bed to listen
to her prayer, the one he taught her:
"if I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take"

In the darkened room he curved
her arm beneath the blanket
brushed his fingertips down her cheek.
He listened at the doorway
for her breath, and whispered
"goodnight, little girl"

Tonight, his house settles deeper
into sleep. He pauses at the window
to hum with the flurries, and by some trick
of the darkened glass it seems
his eyes and mouth are filled with snow

He has his own prayer. Moths hover
in the spaces between his fingers.
He lays his hands against the glass
and believes
that if he turns slowly enough
he will see her standing
like a tall candle he wants
to touch out of darkness

*Lisa McCullough*

*Karen J. Kovacs*

*Eileen O'Tousa*

# Ignition

When I drop you back by your place at 3—
After the 6 coffees we fondly nursed
At Cafe Don where we talked the place shut
Deaf to the crush and the color t v—

The timing's off—bad point to make a date—
Ice moves out from the curb—rutted and grooved
And I kiss you once under the streetlight
To show you I can wait—

Lovers a year ago—but not in Love
I hear what's missing—want to set it straight
Yet you jingle a key free—slip thru the door—
Get back Alone—where you couldn't get to before—

This engine revs high—spends gas like Desire—
I hate to cut it off because it backfires

*William Griffiths*

# The Light in Greece

As soon as the plane lands,
I can feel the light.
It pushes me around, rubs me,
we touch hands.
It is the beginning of understanding.
After a while, it is all right, I get used to knowing
I'm being watched. Small wonder a mythology
started here: at any distance a thing
can change its shape.
Words, easy, compared to the light. Poems
hang thick from the balcony, dry in the sun
in half an hour.

Two rising hawks flame before the sun.
I stand in shadow
in a temple of light
up the white cliffs of Santorini.
It is noon.
There is enough light to divide into three days.
It colors everything; language speeds up,
but the voice of light is shadow.
I think I hear it whisper,
There was once enough light for ten days.

Any true Greek knows.
It is driven in
to the pupils of their eyes.
    Plutarch records the story,
    how a ship off Praxi
    lay waked by a voice
    which told her captain Thamus,
    "At noon you must announce the death
    of the Great God Pan."
    It was at that moment
    that the heartbeat
    passed out of Ancient Greece.
And the light is its echo.

My donkey lurches steadily down to fact
and dinner.

They did not all die. The light throbs with them.
But the land is old, older than numbers,
a stone dropped in the sea with smaller kin.
When the wind comes up in the olive trees,
they clamp down hunched
and thin with bird hands.

Greece is a lidded world
with the pebbled stars
kicked carelessly from the shore
into the listening sky.

(for Rod Jellema)

*Sarah Maté*

*Brian James O'Tousa*

*Ellen P. Brewer*

# The Art of War

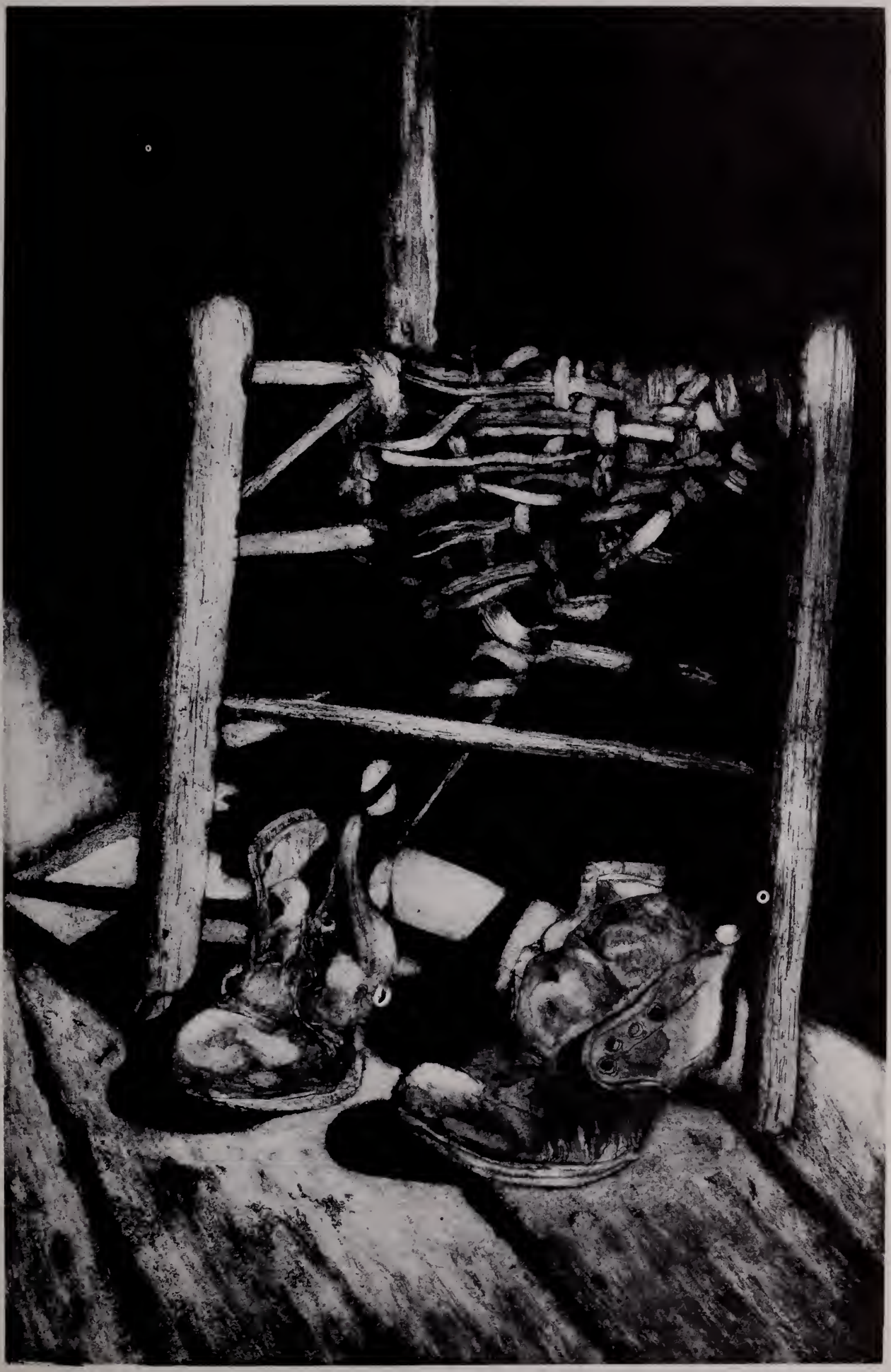
Down in the field and dying,
the world is a round, brown ball.
Smoke stiffens into shapes
that cannot be caught.
The sky goes grey, blood is red,
these are the only colors.

The painter has useless hands.
In summer they bake;
in any season
they fall like leaves
and paper the ground.
The fingers want a brush
a breath
room to sweep the dirt,
to picture this:

How dancers die,
mouth wanting someone,
Blue sky,
Yellow sun.

*Kathy Bearden*

*Debbie Gertler*



*Natalie Benincasa*

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